

Traveling People

A Visit to Lough Aderra in Co. Cork Means Time to Admire and Feed the Graceful Swans

By JUDY ENRIGHT
SPECIAL TO THE BIR

Is there any creature that can capture the imagination more completely than a swan? It's absolutely magical to sit beside a pond or lough (lake) and watch these magnificent snowy birds coming and going, circling and diving for food.

You probably know that swans mate for life. And, you've no doubt heard stories about a swan chasing away any man or beast that dares venture near its nest and that swans are so powerful they can break a man's arm with their powerful wings.



A Whooper Swan's head is beaded with water droplets after he broke the surface of his idyllic pond in his hunt for food. *Judy Enright photo.*

If you're a fan of Irish folklore, then you've no doubt heard about the four Children of Lir, who were turned into swans by their wicked stepmother, Aoifa, and how, in one version of the story, Aibric the Wanderer took them hundreds of years later

to meet Saint Kemoc and how when King Largnen tried to catch them they turned to dust. Ireland's wild swans are protected in deference to the Children of Lir tale and it's said that when someone sees a swan on the wing in Ireland, they say a blessing for the Children of Lir.

This spring, when we traveled through Co. Cork along the main road (the N25) from Dungarvan to Cork City, we made a point of stopping beside what I call "Swan Lake" near Midleton. As you can well imagine, the waterway is not called "Swan Lake" at all but Lough Aderra and it's in Ballintotis, Castlemartyr, Co. Cork. Cars and trucks stop alongside the busy highway to admire and feed the swans, and we did the same. There were probably 50 swans on Lough Aderra, primarily mute swans and a very odd-looking swan that was either a whooper or Bewick swan and was very different from swans we are accustomed to seeing.

We had some day-old scones from the wonderful B&B where we'd stayed the night before - An Bohreen in Dungarvan. Ann Mulligan, who owns the B&B with her husband, Jim, is a magnificent cook who trained at the Ballymaloe Cookery School. The scones, even at a day old, were really much too good to throw in the water, but

we had no other food and really wanted to attract the swans. They came flying, skittering and scooting across the water when they saw the food and it was such a thrill! They are so beautiful.

After about an hour at the Lake, we went into Midleton and had the most delicious lunch at Farmgate, an interesting combination of a farmers' market in the front and a restaurant in the back. In the front, just off the sidewalk, is a shop with all kinds of local produce - cheeses, honey, breads, fruits and veggies. We walked through the shop to get to the comfortable - and packed - restaurant in the back. Lunch was excellent - and we enjoyed a nice glass of white wine with it.

Farmgate is open Monday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and lunch is served from noon to 3:30. Dinner is served Thursday through Saturday from 6:30 to 9:30. The restaurant and shop are closed Sundays and bank holidays and for a few days around the Christmas holidays. As with all recommendations we make in this column, you are always wise to call ahead (021 463 2771) to ensure that hours haven't changed since we visited.

And as for swans, if you are as hooked on them as we are, they can be found in many other places around the country, including Cork City



A Mute Swan at the 30-acre Loughaderra Lake on the Cork-Youghal Road in Co. Cork. *Judy Enright photo.*

and Galway, lots of sites in the North, and wherever there is an expanse of water and probably friendly passersby who feed them.

MORE BIRDS

Some 53 rare birds were recently released in Counties Down and Wicklow as part of a phased reintroduction of the Red Kite to Ireland, we read in *The Irish Times*. Last year about 30 Red Kites were reintroduced and, while the majority survived, one was found shot shortly after it was released. It is hoped that the latest birds released will go on to breed. The Red Kite has a distinctive forked tail and was once common in Ireland and Britain but was driven to extinction (except in some of the most remote parts of Wales) by shooting, trapping, and poisoning.

The *Times* wrote, "Of the new batch of birds to be introduced to Ireland, 27 Red Kites have been brought to Co. Down... the other 26 birds will be released by the Golden Eagle Trust in Co. Wicklow. The Red Kite is so called because of its reddish brown body and tail. Its tail is deeply forked making it an easily recognizable bird. Kites have a wingspan of up to 1.8 meters. Tracking of the newly released Kites will be possible through the fitting of satellite packs to two of the birds. These tiny solar powered packs are fitted to the birds' backs and allow the project team to check the exact location of the birds via the Internet. Updates on the project can be seen on the Golden Eagle Trust website at goldeneagle.ie."

To learn more about Ireland's birds, visit birdsireland.com or [\[watchireland.ie\]\(http://watchireland.ie\)](http://bird-</p>
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SEAWEED

The Irish are focusing on energy sources and are currently studying seaweed for possible use as a biofuel. Scientists claim (again, in a story from *The Irish Times*) that seaweed from Ireland's coasts - which already has many uses, including food supplements, fertilizer, liquid seaweed extracts, cosmetics, body care products, seaweed treatments, and biomedicine - could help run cars in the future.

The experts say biofuel could be produced from the 16 varieties of algae that grow in Ireland. Irish Seaweed Centre manager Dr. Stefan Kraan said: "With its rich, sustainable, seaweed resources, Ireland is poised to become an important player in the next generation of biofuel production. We will examine the economic and social aspects of... biofuel production from macroalgae." Kraan was speaking at an annual international conference of experts on the issue at NUI Galway.

The Australian seaweed expert Prof. Michael A Borowitzka said biofuel needs to be produced cheaply on a year-round basis to be commercially viable.

The NUI Galway event was organized by the International Society for Applied Phycology (the scientific study of algae) and attracted engineers, manufacturers, contractors, scientists, researchers, students, economists, industry representatives and policymakers. Ireland already has 16 commercially useful seaweed species and its location off Western Europe, surrounded by clean seas, could be a major selling point to the

world market, the *Times* wrote.

When you're next in Ireland, be on the lookout for seaweed soaps and hair products. They're very nice and fun to bring home as gifts.

FESTIVALS

If you'll be in Northern Ireland this month, be sure to take visit Ireland's North West Dancing Championships on Sept. 20 and 21 in Londonderry. This is a two-day festival of championship Irish dancing that is attended by competitors from all over the world. For more information, call 44 (0)28 7126 4455.

If you plan to be in Dublin in September, don't miss Style in The City from Sept. 11-14. During this event, Merrion Square Gardens are transformed into the fashion, beauty and style capital of the world with top Irish fashion houses coming together in one venue. There will be features from a fully-seated catwalk show to boutique shopping, pampering Style Oasis and more. For details, visit styleinthecity.ie

TRAVEL PLANS

Whenever you decide to visit Ireland, stop by your favorite travel agent or visit the Aer Lingus' website (aerlingus.com) for the latest direct flights and cheapest ground deals. Flights and deals are also offered by US Airways (usairways.com) and several other airlines, but usually involve layovers in Chicago, Newark, New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere, adding several hours to the trip but also reducing the cost.

For seasonal happenings, check out Tourism Ireland's website at discoverireland.com and Fálte Ireland's site at discoverireland.ie.

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