

Biodiversity agus mo Laethanta Saoire

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It always seems unfair that the sun really shines just as the schools are about to start back. For some of our young people, it's their very first day, while for others it's a chance to boast about three months of fun and adventure, and like so many before them, their first homework assignment will probably be a report on '*Mo Laethanta Saoire*'. So how many of you can remember what you wrote about the *Laethanta Saoire*, and for the many parents out there, are your summer holiday memories much different than those of your children?

Rain, hail or shine, most of us would have spent our summer holidays outside, whether it was playing football, chasing butterflies, making daisy chains or the much anticipated trip *cois fharraige*. The trips to the seaside are usually those we remember most vividly, though not always for the right reasons! How many families went for a swim in the sea together, only to find *na faoileáin ag ithe na gceapairí* when they returned ashore. How many children were distracted from sand castle building by the array of *ainmhithe sna linnte carraige* and entranced by the sideways walk of crabs or the waving tentacles of anemones. How many thought they had caught a baby whale when they went *ag iascaireacht* only to find a giant clump of carraigín at the end of their line. And of course there were many tears when you accidentally stepped barefoot on a *smugairle róin*.

But the seaside wasn't the only trip we remember. How many families remember going for a walk together on a Sunday evening, whether it was a hike through the Slieve Aughty mountains, a ramble across the Burren, a stroll around the Loop Head peninsula or simply *ag siúl ar bhóthar glas*. Finding goose grass (also known as robin-run-the-hedge, bedstraw, cleavers, or for many of us, 'the sticky stuff') in a hedge provided endless amusement as we stuck it on the backs of others. Of course paying such close attention to a hedge didn't impress *an Dreoilín agus an Spideog* for fear you'd find their nest. Their warning calls and demonstrations meant you weren't far away from a nest yet the thorns of *an Dris* and the stinging leaves of *an Neantóg* kept little hands at bay. And they weren't the only birds of summer. Can you remember the thrill of hearing the call of *an Chuach* and calling back, or finding the nest of *an Fháinleog* high up in the corner of the garden shed.

For those of us who lived in the countryside, there was also the annual visit of the cousins from 'the big smoke', who had to be reintroduced to the farming way of life, and who provided endless opportunities for laughter and teasing with their innocence and lack of farming knowledge. Of course, the days of saving hay and cutting turf are few and far between, and in many areas, survive only as the distant memories of older generations, yet in many parks and open spaces across Clare today, there are many children who still delight in finding a *Bóin Dé* and counting its spots, or using a small fishing net to catch *Féileacáin* of all different colours, while a patch of *féar fada* is a perfect hiding place in a game of 'hide and seek'. And for the more adventurous, a good tree to climb was always a great find and provided hours of entertainment, though falling from one wasn't very

pleasant. However, a trip *go dtí an Ospidéal* and any resulting stitches or scars provided great stories when you got back to school!

So what are your favourite summer *saoire* memories like? Do they include foreign holidays and playing computer games, or do they include something *níos simplí*? The smell of fresh cut grass, the taste of warm lemonade on a family picnic, running away from bumblebees, chasing fairies (the seed-heads of *caisearbháin*), trying to catch those elusive grasshoppers or feeding the ducks at a local park. Do you remember being lost *sna coillte*, standing on mountaintops, wading through rivers or even getting your wellingtons stuck in a swamp? Do you remember being attacked by *míoltóga*, startled by the sudden flight of a bird from a hedge, stung by nettles and using dock leaves to ease the pain?

So when your children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces come to you looking for help with their first piece of *obair bhaile*, try to remember what you said when asked about *mo Laethanta Saoire*! You might surprise yourself with how much you remember, and even more so when what you remember best are the simple things. Until next time...

Glossary

Mo Laethanta Saoire – My Holidays

Cois fharraige – Seaside

Faoileáin - Seagulls

Ceapairí - Sandwiches

Ainmhithe - Animals

Linnte carriage – Rock Pools

ag iascaireacht - Fishing

Smugairle róin - Jellyfish

ag siúl - Walking

Bóthar glas – Green Road

Dreoilín - Wren

Spideog - Robin

Dris – Briar/ Bramble

Neantóg – Nettle

Cuach - Cuckoo

Fáinleog - Swallow

Bóin Dé - Ladybird

Féileacáin - Butterflies

Féar fada – Long Grass

Ospidéal – Hospital

níos simplí – More simply

Caisearbháin - Dandelions

Coillte - Woods

Míoltóga - Midges

Obair bhaile - Homework