

April- Spring Arrivals

With the warmer weather and longer days coming in, it is starting to really feel like Spring! This is a great time of year to get outside and start noticing nature. There is a big increase in the abundance and variety of wildlife around us. This month let's choose a few different plants and animals that will be springing up at this time of year to focus on!

Spring Migrants

While some birds like the Brent Geese will have left Ireland after winter was over, others will be arriving in spring to stay for the summer. Once April comes we can expect to start seeing swallows, swifts and house martins swooping through the air above us catching insects like flies, midges and aphids. All of these birds spend winter in Africa and return to Ireland every spring where they will nest, lay eggs and raise their chicks. Many of these nest sites are reused every year. Many swallows and swifts will nest in barns, sheds and the eaves of houses. You can help by attaching a swift nest box to the outside of your school or house or even leaving a [free space like a shelf for swallows](#) under the roof of a shed, garage or barn along with a gap for them to enter. These birds will not be attracted by bird feeders as they eat insects whilst they are flying.



Swifts spend almost all of their time in flight. Their feet are not suited to spending time on a branch or ground



Activity Idea 1: Spend some time outside looking for any birds which have recently arrived. Use this [spotter sheet](#) to help you. Note some birds on this like the Turtle Dove and Cuckoo are very rare so don't expect to see them pop up on your first walk!

Activity Idea 2: Try your hand building your own nest with this [activity](#)!

Sea Birds

If you live near the coast you can also expect to find some sea birds return towards land for the breeding season. April through to late summer can often bring a huge number of sea birds like Puffins and Gannets into coastal regions to nest. These birds spend most of their time feeding out at sea during the winter months. However, when spring comes they need to find a safe place to lay their eggs and raise their chicks. They generally do this in huge colonies or groups along the edges of cliffs. These birds do not nest up in trees so they are more at risk of other animals finding the nests and taking the eggs or chicks. They will often try and find safe places such as islands without any animals like foxes living on them or steep cliffs which are hard to get at to build their nests. You can find large colonies of sea birds like puffins, gannets, razorbills and guillemots in many places including the Saltee Islands in Wexford, the Cliffs of Moher and The Skellig Islands.

Activity: If you live near the coast investigate whether there is a spot that is used by nesting birds and go for a visit. Make sure you don't get too close! Bring this [spotter sheet](#) with you to identify some common sea birds.



Gannets nest very closely together on cliffs. The chicks are very fluffy and grow big quickly! The black and white bird on the left is a chick!



The Puffin's brightly coloured bill make them stand out. They are more likely to nest in burrows or small holes. The adults come in and out to feed their chicks.

April Flowers

There is a huge change in the plants growing around the country this month. Lots of colours are reappearing with leaves emerging again on trees, new plants growing and flowers returning. Two interesting plants to keep an eye out for are Wild Garlic and Lords and Ladies. One is delicious and one is poisonous so they are two good plants to be able to identify for very different reasons. Your nose will often lead you to wild garlic which has a strong garlicky smell and grows like a carpet on the floor of forests. By April you can often find it covering a large area all growing closely together. It

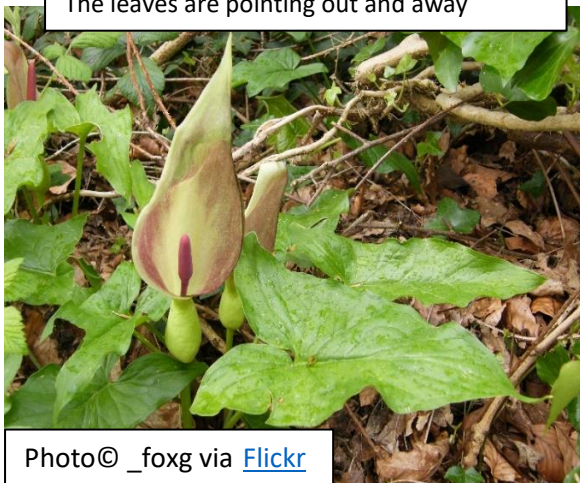
has small white flowers but it is the leaves which have the most flavour. Once you have given them a wash you can eat them or use them to cook with- they are delicious and taste a little bit sweeter than cloves of garlic you might buy in the shops.

Lords and Ladies on the other hand should not be touched at all. It often grows in hedges and woodlands including near wild garlic so it is important to be able to tell them apart. It is harmful not just to eat but even to touch, so it is one to avoid. It has green leaves shaped like arrows and in April its flowers start to grow. The flowers are small and purple and are surrounded by a “hood” which looks like a pointed leaf. The plant grows very close to the ground and develops a bright red cluster of berries in autumn. These are also poisonous.

Activity 1: Learn more about wild garlic and several other common Irish species with these info cards and quiz [here](#).

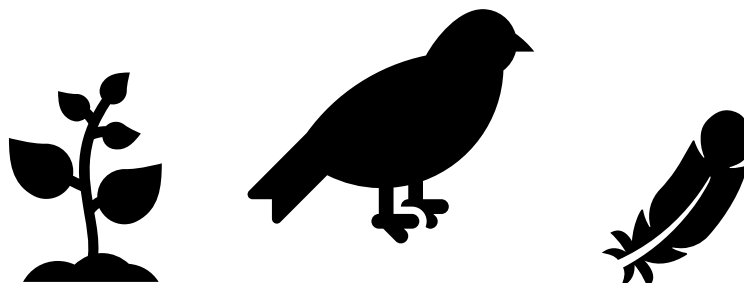
Activity 2: Head outside and see what other plants you can identify with the [LEAF spotter sheet](#) for April.

Lords and Ladies- the flower is in the centre.
The leaves are pointing out and away



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Wild Garlic growing in a forest. This plant can spread very quickly!



Best of luck this month!