

Site Guide

by **Mary Durkin**

with additional information by Pat Durkin & Ian McCullagh

Kilkenny city area

Peace Park Walk, Kilkenny
Photo: C  il  n MacLochlainn

The parks and riverside walks in Kilkenny city are accessible by public transport, bicycle or on foot, as is a wonderful fen marsh within the city limits, writes **Mary Durkin** of our Kilkenny Branch

Kilkenny is a small, medieval city on the River Nore, with a castle built by the Normans in 1195 at its centre (since substantially modified) and many well-preserved churches, monasteries and abbeys.

There is an abundance of parks, woodlands and freshwater habitats in and around the city where birds and other wildlife thrive; they are

within easy reach by **bus, cycling or walking.**

A remarkable feature of the city in summer is the presence of **Swifts** overhead everywhere you go. Outside the city, the Kilkenny Branch is discovering more and more **Barn Owls** every year, perhaps reflecting a resurgence in this rare species.

Kilkenny Castle Park

Kilkenny Castle Park is beautifully maintained by the OPW, with impressive trees, lawns and wildflower meadows. The Kilkenny Branch of BirdWatch Ireland holds its annual dusk chorus walk here on a Thursday in May.

Sparrowhawks and **Ravens** are seen here regularly. A wooded area holds a range of species including **Jay, Treecreeper, Blackcap, Chiffchaff** and a variety of **thrushes, finches** and **tits**. There is a small lake at the end of the park, surrounded by trees. Species found here include **Mallard, Little Grebe, Mute Swan, Grey Heron, Coot** and **Moorhen**. The walls of the castle itself are home to at least fourteen pairs of **Swifts** each summer.

The Canal Walk

To make the River Nore more navigable, construction began on a canal alongside it. However, it was never completed and, today,

a well-wooded riverside walk follows its course south from the castle to Ormond Bridge on the city's ring road (N10). There is a pedestrian bridge underneath Ormond Bridge which links up with a boardwalk on the opposite bank, which completes a loop walk all the way back to Kilkenny city centre.

Look for **Kingfishers** and **Dippers** along the Canal Walk and also butterflies including **Holly Blue** and **Peacock**. Beyond Ormond Bridge, a track follows the river south as far as Bennetsbridge.

Newpark Fen

The Kilkenny Branch holds an annual outing to Newpark Fen in February, to mark International Wetlands Day. The 13-hectare fen is beside New Orchard Road, inside the city limits, and yet it is wild and unspoilt.

The county council maintains a 1-km loop walk around the fen, offering views of its ponds, marshland, woodlands and reedbeds. Species found here include **Snipe, Water Rail, Sedge Warbler, Reed Bunting, Little Grebe, Moorhen, Mallard** and **Woodcock**. **Swallows** and **martins** feed over the fen and, at dusk, **bats** appear in numbers. The trees hold **Long-tailed Tits, Treecreepers, etc.**

River Nore Linear Walk

The Nore Linear Walk is accessed from Riverside Drive (off Freshford Road) and stretches 2½km from Bishopsmeadows upriver to the weir at Bleach Road in Talbotsinch. It has two paths running side by



Weir at Bishopsmeadows. Photo: C  il  n MacLochlainn

side, one for pedestrians, the other for cyclists.

Look for **Dipper, Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail, Mallard, Little Egret** and **Cormorant** along the river. The patches of wild scrub by the river hold **Stonechats** and **Bullfinches**.

Look also for **Coal Tits** nesting in the lamps that illuminate the walk; they nest in the boxes behind the light bulbs.

There are plans to link the Nore Linear Walk to the Canal Walk by installing a boardwalk from Green Street and Green's Bridge south past the Abbey Quarters to the Canal Walk.

Peace Park Walk

The Peace Park Walk is a short riverside path that offers a wonderful view of the city skyline. Its impressive memorial commemorates the many hundreds from Kilkenny who died in the two world wars. The Lady Desart footbridge connects this walk to the Abbey Quarters.

Park on Michael Street to access the walk.

Newpark Fen. Photo: C  il  n MacLochlainn





Wild flowers in Castle Park. Photo: Mary Durkin

Look for **Spotted Flycatchers**, which nest in the old stone walls of the park in summer; they also nest at Green's Bridge.

The opposite riverbank is dense with willows and other shrubs. Note the Breaghagh River, which enters the Nore beside the new bridge. It is inaccessible and quite overgrown, providing **Mute Swans** with the security they need for nesting.

Daubenton's Bats are seen regularly under the new bridge. **Peregrines** nest on St Mary's Cathedral, across the river from the Peace Park.

Jeninstown Wood

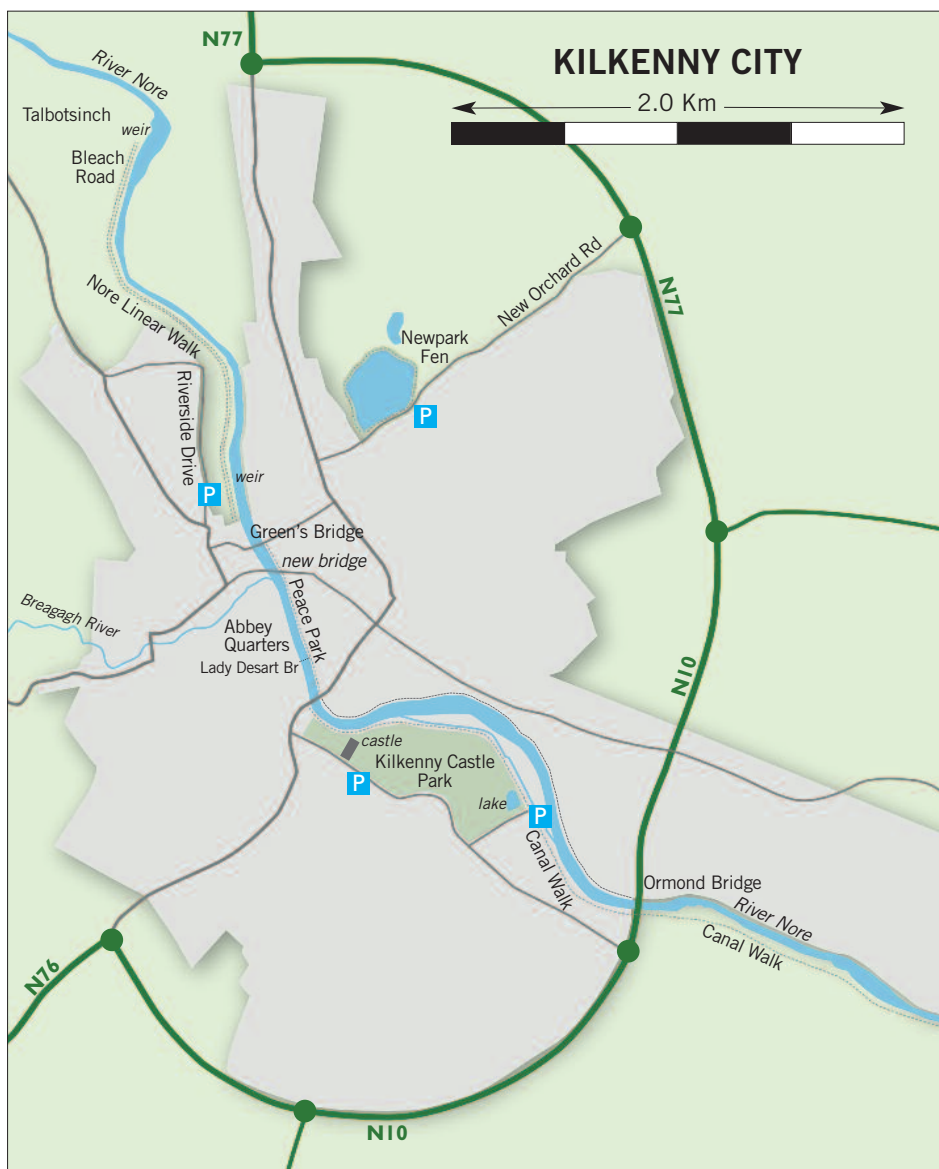
The Kilkenny Branch holds its annual Dawn Chorus Day walk in Jeninstown Wood, located off the Castlecomer Road (N78), a few kilometres north of Kilkenny.

Formerly the demesne woodland of the Bryan family of Jeninstown House, Jeninstown Wood retains some features of the old country estate, including its walled garden. It is a popular spot for family outings.

Thomas Moore wrote *The Last Rose of Summer* while staying at the house.

Now managed by Coillte Outdoors, the park offers three walks (short, medium and long) through beautiful old mixed woodlands. Kilkenny's first **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** arrived here two years ago and are now nesting here and in nearby Ballyraffon Wood beside the Castlecomer Road, which also has a nice loop walk.

The woodland is also home to **Jays**, **Ravens**, **Long-eared Owls**, **Blackcaps**, **Chiffchaffs** and **Treecreepers**, and its **Bluebell**



MAP by COILL AN FHALTAIGH

meadows are a spring highlight. Very tame **Sika Deer** are kept in an enclosure by the walled garden, a major attraction for children.

Coill an Fhaltaigh

Coill An Fhaltaigh, the People's Millennium Forest (established in 2000), is located off the Callan Road (N76), some six kilometres from Kilkenny. It is very popular with the people of the town as a venue for walking.

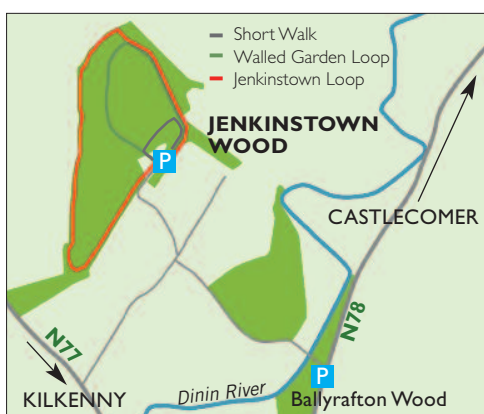
It covers about 90 hectares and has two way-marked loop walks: the Green Walk (2.2 km, 1 ½ hr), suitable for a lengthy stroll,

and the longer Red Walk (3.3 km, 2 hr), which loops around the People's Millennium Forest section of the wood.

There are some six hectares of old oak woodland, while the rest was planted with conifers until 2000, when they were removed and replaced with a range of native tree species – **Sessile Oak**, **Ash**, **Birch**, **Wild Cherry**, **Spindle**.

Here you will find **Jays**, **Blackcaps**, **Chiffchaffs**, **Red Squirrels**, **Pine Martens** and a range of **butterflies**, **dragonflies** and **damselflies**.

In spring, **Bluebells** bloom under the old oak trees, a wondrous sight ■



Great Spotted Woodpecker. Photo: Piotr Rak

