# National Parks

## and others important areas

By Gillian Stewart & Mags Flaherty

Photo courtesy of www.npws.ie

Torc Waterfall in Killarney National Park

A National Park is a special place that has been set aside for its beautiful scenery, for its wildlife, and as a place for people to enjoy. National Parks are large – even the smallest (the Burren) is approximately 1500 hectares.

In Ireland, we have six National Parks (see page 12). Our first National Park was Killarney, which was established in 1932. Our newest one is Ballycroy in Co. Mayo, which was only set up in 1998.

All our National Parks are owned by the state, which means that we all own them! The National Parks & Wildlife Service looks after them for us. They manage the areas to protect nature and landscapes. This means that future generations will also be able to enjoy these amazing places.

We can all visit our National Parks, and they are free! Wildlife comes first, but there are many activities that do not harm nature and that are allowed. Many people use the National Parks to go hill walking, nature watching, or picnicking. Some of the National Parks have a visitor centre or a castle to visit, although you may have to pay to go in.

National Parks are a great place to go and see nature. Whether you are looking for rare pine martens in the Burren, insect-eating sundews in the bogs of Wicklow, or golden eagles in Glenveagh, there is lots of spectacular wildlife to be seen in our National Parks.

### Park Rangers

There are Rangers all over Ireland, including in the National Parks. They work for the National Parks & Wildlife Service. Their job is to make sure that habitats and wildlife are protected. Clare Heardman a ranger in the Beara Peninsula describes her job on page 7.

### Nature reserves and other important areas

In Ireland, the six National Parks are not the only areas set aside for nature. We also have nature reserves, NHAs (Natural Heritage Areas), SACs (Special Areas of Conservation), SPAs (Special Protection Areas), and more. All of these are areas that are protected by law in different ways and for different things. Nature reserves offer the highest level of protection in Ireland and are smaller than National Parks. Only very special places become nature reserves. NHAs are for habitats, SACs are for habitats and species, and SPAs are for birds.

### The Oldest and Largest National Parks

Photo courtesy of www.nps.gov

The Old Faithful geyser in Yellowstone National Park.

The world's first national park, Yellowstone National Park, in the USA, was created in 1872. Located in the states of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, it covers 8,987 square km (898,317 hectares) and is home to a large variety of wildlife including grizzly bears, wolves, bison, and elk. It is also famous for its collection of geysers and hot springs, including one of the most famous - Old Faithful.

The world's largest national park is North-east Greenland National Park, covering 972,000 square km (97,200,000 hectares), and takes in the entire northeastern coastline and interior sections of Greenland. Created in 1974, much of the park's interior is covered by ice, but there are ice-free areas long the coast and to the north. It is home to such animals as polar bears, musk ox and walrus.

North-east Greenland National

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