

All in a Day's Work

Clare Heardman - Conservation Ranger

Clare Heardman works for the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) as a Conservation Ranger for the Beara Peninsula. She is based in Glengarriff Woods Nature Reserve, Co Cork.



the Beara Peninsula is fantastic: sea, islands, mountains, old oak woodlands, rivers, lakes, blanket bog, rocky seashores and more. Successful projects also create a real buzz. For example, in Glengarriff Nature Reserve we dug a new lake to benefit a very rare dragonfly, the Downy Emerald. Within 3 years the dragonfly was found breeding at the lake. And last winter, we had up to 70 rare lesser horseshoe bats using a new hibernaculum (winter roost) we had constructed the previous year.

A Day in the Life of Clare Heardman

Have you always been interested in what you do?

Yes. I studied Zoology in Edinburgh and then did a project on otters in Nepal. My first 'real' job was on a sand dune system looking at Natterjack Toads. When I moved to Ireland I worked on contract to NPWS for a number of years, mapping sites and writing conservation plans. I became a Conservation Ranger 10 years ago.

What is a day in your life like?

Every day is different. I might be at sea counting harbour seals in Bantry Bay or even helping UCC tag seals in Kenmare River. In winter I could be underground, counting bats and in summer looking in attics for the rare lesser horseshoe bat. I also take part in some National surveys e.g. the Bird Atlas and the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. If I'm not doing survey work, I might be working in one of the two nature reserves I am involved in managing; Glengarriff Woods and Uragh Wood. Or I could be out monitoring one of the 30 conservation sites in my area (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Natural Heritage Areas). I also assess development applications to see if they will impact on conservation sites. Education is also an aspect of my job e.g. giving guided walks and talks. And then there's always paperwork to be done and reports to be written!

What's the best thing about your job?

The fact that every day is different means the job never gets boring. I also love being paid to work in one of the most beautiful places in Ireland. The variety of habitats on

What is the worst thing about your job?

I hate to see hillsides being burnt illegally (i.e. between 1st March and 31st August). It leaves a trail of destruction in its wake, destroying the nests of ground-nesting birds and killing small animals such as lizards and voles.

Where does your work take you?

My work takes me all over the Beara Peninsula from mountain top to offshore islands. Sometimes I join other Rangers e.g. counting seabirds in their area or travelling all west Cork at night doing a hare or bat survey. I also travel further a field to attend training courses and meetings. Once I was even lucky enough to go on an exchange trip to Hungary for a tour of the National Parks there.

Do you work alone or as part of a team?

Often I work alone, but there is a great team around me. There are other Conservation Rangers covering neighbouring areas plus a District Conservation Officer. The team also includes three General Operatives who do all the hard work in Glengarriff Nature Reserve i.e. removing invasive Rhododendron and building footpaths.

What would you say to someone wanting your job?

It's very tough at the moment because the recession means that the posts are not being filled. However, in preparation for

when things get better it would be important to do a relevant third level course and also get some practical experience e.g. by volunteering in one of the National Parks.



Photos courtesy of Glengarriff Nature Reserve

Top: Wood and mountains in Glengarriff Nature Reserve.
Above: The new lake at the Nature Reserve.
Left: A tagged grey seal.