



Pond dipping Workshops and School Talks

The Lough Carra LIFE Project in collaboration with the Lough Carra Catchment Association (LCCA) and with partial funding from LAWPRO, facilitated school talks and pond dipping workshops during April 2024. As the workshops started in April this year, a bit earlier than last year, we saw slight differences in what we found. The water was higher and the creatures that bit shy considering the dry but cold April weather.

School talks

This year, in collaboration with Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark, talks were given at three different primary schools and one secondary school, before the students went out to the lake for pond dipping events. These talks were given as a precursor to the pond dipping events so that the students would have an idea as to what to expect before they went out.

The talks started with Benjamin Thebaudeau, Geologist for JCWL, talking about the geology of the area that Joyce Country covers and the different types of rock present in the area, e.g. Limestone, mudstone (sandstone), slate, greywacke, and the famous green tinged Connemara marble. You may think that the subject of “rocks” would have garnered little interest from school children, however, on the contrary, they seemed fascinated, especially when Benjamin referenced the use of these rocks in Minecraft, a popular computer game that revolves around building structures from the ground upwards using different types of rocks. He brought in examples of different types of rocks for the students to hold.

The second part of the school talks were given by Lough Carra LIFE Project Manager, Kieran Flynn and Community Admin Officer, Damian Jordan. These talks brought things from the ground level up, speaking about the lake itself and all the different habitats around it, such as orchid rich grasslands, fens and wetlands and limestone rich pavements.



Kieran spoke to the children about the importance of these habitats and how the lake supports these ecosystems and the species that populate them.



We also talked about the various actions being carried out by the Lough Carra LIFE Project to protect and conserve the lake, including the groundwater study, and the agri-environment scheme.



Above: Lough Carra LIFE Groundwater Officer and Geological Survey Ireland dye trace testing local karst features as part of the groundwater study.

Pond dipping

We then move to the pond dipping itself out on the lake. The workshops were held by ecologist Karina Dingerkus. Karina gave her usual brief presentation detailing the role of water on people's everyday lives, where our water comes from, what we as humans use it for, and the importance of not polluting our waterways.

Students were then encouraged to walk in the lake along the shore and carryout what is known as 'kick sampling', where the student places a pond net in the water where they are standing and

agitates stones and gravel on the lake's bed with their foot for a minimum of two minutes. The material 'stirred up' in the water is collected when the student swishes their net through the water.



As ever the pond dipping proved an interesting outing and activity for the school children and the addition of the school talks proved a real winner as the students had a good grasp of what they were about to undertake. It's hard to take in information sometimes when you're standing at the side of a cold and chilly Lough Carra. So, the classroom talks gave them a good head start and when they came out the next day to do the pond dipping, they knew what they were at and knew about the habitats around them.

Damian Jordan, Community Administration Officer, Lough Carra LIFE Project, April 2024.