

An illustration of a spring scene in Northern Ireland. It features a brown rabbit sitting in a field of green grass, surrounded by various flowers including purple bellflowers, white snowdrops, and yellow daisies. A bee is also visible flying near the flowers. The title 'Spring in Northern Ireland' is written in white text on a purple background.

Spring in Northern Ireland

Calendar Clashes

Meteorology is a science concerned with atmosphere and the weather. If we follow the meteorological calendar then the months of spring are March, April and May.

According to the ancient Celtic calendar, in pre-Christian times a festival called Imbolc (at the beginning of February) marked the arrival of spring. Later, the Christian celebration of St Brigid's Day on February 1st would signal the beginning of the season.

Flowers and Bees

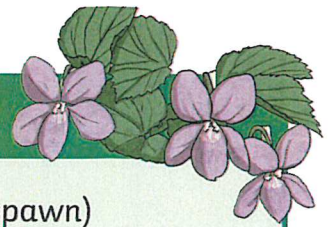
Daffodils are bright splashes of colour that herald spring each year. Later, bluebells appear, carpeting many woodland floors in Northern Ireland with vivid colour.

The buzzing of bees seeking flowers' nectar is a sound that is associated with spring and summer. In Northern Ireland, bumblebees, honeybees and wild solitary bees can be spotted.

Birds

Early morning birdsong provides a natural wake up call for many people in the springtime. The birds are seeking to defend their territory and to find a mate.

Swallows, chiffchaffs, house martins and swifts are some of the migrant birds that make a welcome springtime return to our shores. Birds will build their nests and have their chicks in spring.



New Life

Lambs are often born in spring. The ewes need lots of fresh grass so that they can make milk for the lambs. Spring's warmer days make it easier for baby animals to survive.

Frogs will lay their eggs (spawn) between late winter and early spring, with the tadpoles appearing between February and May.

Mad March Hares

The Irish hare is one of Ireland's oldest mammals. It is found across the island, but nowhere else. Hares live above ground; their homes are known as forms and their babies are called leverets. Hares are mainly active at night.

The behaviour of hares in springtime inspired the old saying, 'as mad as a March hare'. During the season, hares

can be spotted 'boxing' one another, as the females will sometimes fight off the attention of the males. As the grass is shorter in March, this is usually the best time to see the hares fight, leap and run (at speeds of up to 45 miles per hour!).

Waking from Hibernation

The arrival of spring is the wake up call for two mammals that hibernate in Northern Ireland – bats and hedgehogs.

Spring Holidays and Festivals

St Patrick's Day is celebrated on 17th March each year in honour of Ireland's patron saint. In the UK and Ireland, Mother's Day is celebrated three weeks before Easter Sunday. Easter Sunday itself is not on the same date each year; it will always fall in either the month of March or the month of April.



Questions

- What are the months of spring according to the meteorological calendar?
 - February, March, April
 - March, April, May
 - March and April
- What are some of the migrating birds that return in spring?
 - swallows, swifts and house martins
 - crows, robins, ravens
 - chaffinches and goldfinches
- Is this sentence true or false? Tick one. 'Easter Sunday is not on the same date each year.'
 - True
 - False
- Match up the phrases correctly to describe the Irish hare.

They can run at speeds of up to...

oldest mammals

They are one of Ireland's...

leverets

Baby hares are called...

45 miles per hour

A hare's home is known as...

a form

- What festival marked the beginning of spring in pre-Christian times?

- How did hares inspire the old expression 'mad as a March hare'?

- Which mammals wake from hibernation in spring?

8. Why do you think some birds migrate and only return to Northern Ireland in the spring?
