

# Themed woodland walks to award winning Clonad Woodlands

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Three themed woodland walks were organised this year to the 2019 RDS-FS Award winning Clonad Woodlands in Tullamore, Co. Offaly starting with a Certification Woodland Walk in July followed by a Forest Food Walk and Wild Food Cooking Demonstration in September and an Ecology Woodland Walk in November.

The walks were a joint Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA) and Irish Forestry Unit Trust (IForUT) initiative organised with funding assistance from the Forestry Division of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as part of their Forestry Promotion campaign.



Local beekeepers John and Dymphna Summerville with Stacey Bradley of IForUT looking at the see-through display hive at the Clonad Forest Food Walk.



Some of the participants at the Clonad field day enjoying the food from the forest.

At the start of each of the walks, IForUT forester Stacey Bradley provided participants with a brief overview of Clonad woodlands and led the Forest Certification Walk with Oisín Meagher outlining how IForUT manages their forests for certification. Clonad woodland was one of the first private forests in Ireland to achieve Certification to an international Sustainable Forest Management Standard. The subject of Group Certification and the various requirements and templates available on [www.groupcertification.ie](http://www.groupcertification.ie) to meet these requirements was also covered. Colonel Wolfgang Wolter, who has managed the deer population in Clonad woodlands for many years, treated participants to a wealth of information on deer management and general hunting lore on each of the woodland walks.

Earlier in the year the IForUT forest manager decided to introduce native bees into Clonad Woodlands. Local beekeepers John and Dymphna Summerville moved a number of bee hives into the woods. Dymphna and John were on hand at the woodland walks to talk to participants about the Irish Native Honey Bee (*Apis mellifera mellifera*) and the production of woodland honey from Clonad woodlands. For the Forest Food Walk they brought along a see-through display hive and participants were fascinated to see this display with John Summerville showing participants how to recognise the queen bee.



Bernard Gibney and Mary Bulfin at Clonad Forest Food Walk.

Central to the Forest Food Walk was the wild food foraging led by Mary Bulfin, with the assistance of Bernard Gibney of Gibney's Garden Preserves and Georgina Kemmy. Within minutes participants were shown their first mushrooms and herbs with Mary describing their uses and origins. Bernard Gibney was particularly pleased when Mary pulled up a huge bunch of Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) which he was going to use in his herb butter for the Wild Food Cookery demonstration later in the day.

The foraging for mushrooms was a great success and participants were surprised at the wealth of mushrooms that could be found in Clonad woodlands. With the help of Mary, a number of edible mushrooms were identified, poisonous ones as well, so the clear warning given was not to eat any mushrooms unless you are absolutely sure that they are edible.

After the foraging, participants were treated to a Wild Food Cookery demonstration with Bernard Gibney and Mary Bulfin preparing some delicious yet simple food over a wood fire, using some of the herbs and mushrooms gathered in the forest that day.

The topic of Continuous Cover Forestry was also covered during the walks by Christian Brennan, a forester and neighbour, who is well familiar with these great woodlands.

On the Woodland Ecology Walk, led by local plant ecologist Fiona Devery, ecologically important plants, shrubs, trees and habitats were highlighted and outlined and how these woodlands can contribute to the local ecology.

A similar set of Themed Woodland Walks will be organised in 2020. The walks are free, but pre-registration for all of the walks will be required through Eventbrite to receive the itinerary of the event and directions to the site. Keep an eye out for further details on the new ITGA website [www.itga.ie](http://www.itga.ie) or search for Clonad Woodland Walk on [www.eventbrite.ie](http://www.eventbrite.ie)

Preliminary dates can be found in the diary section at the end of this yearbook.



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