

# From Working Quarry to Nature Reserve

Beach Road Nature Reserve



## ABOUT BRIGHTER WHITEHEAD

Whitehead is a small Edwardian seaside town with commanding views of Belfast Lough and the Irish Sea. Brighter Whitehead was established to ensure our town always looks its best.

The aims of the group from the start was to contribute towards enhancing the town through environmental improvements in association with other community groups, businesses and statutory organisations.

To contact us visit our website  
[www.brighterwhitehead.co.uk](http://www.brighterwhitehead.co.uk)  
or visit [www.beachroad.org.uk](http://www.beachroad.org.uk)



## FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on Beach Road Nature Reserve contact Carrickfergus Borough Council's Parks & Countryside Section on 028 9335 8000 or email [greenspace@carrickfergus.org](mailto:greenspace@carrickfergus.org) or visit the website [www.carrickfergus.org](http://www.carrickfergus.org)



Beach Road Nature Reserve is an excellent example of nature's resilience by process of natural succession. It demonstrates how a landscape scarred by human activity can be returned to nature. This area has evolved from a dumping site to a wildlife haven in just 25 years.

## HISTORY OF WHITEHEAD QUARRY

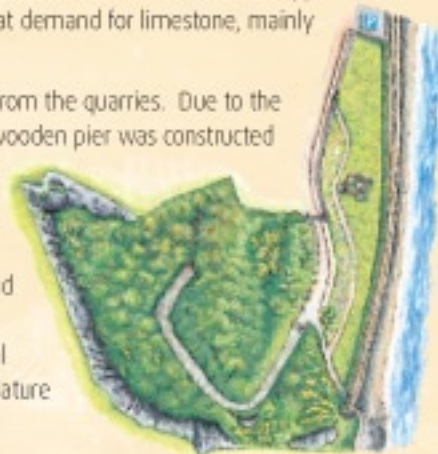
The headland at the old quarry is known as White Head and it was so called because at one time it had an outer formation of limestone. Very little limestone remains today due to extensive quarrying, but once limestone was plentiful.

It is recorded that, starting in 1868 a considerable trade in broken stone was carried out with the Carrickfergus and Larne Railway Company, who operated from a siding near the quarry. Many of the foundations of the early houses in Whitehead were made with stones from the quarry.

A natural harbour existed in the form of an inlet eroded by the sea, and limestone was shipped from there in little boats. During the 1800s there was a great demand for limestone, mainly used for building purposes and making roads.

A harbour was built for the purpose of exporting limestone from the quarries. Due to the fact that the harbour was tidal and prone to silting, a large wooden pier was constructed into deeper water to facilitate larger boats. Local men were employed both in the quarry and in the construction of the harbour.

The exportation of limestone from the quarry came to an end in the late 1880s. In the 1920s the quarry closed, and from 1955 to 1982 the site was used as the town's waste disposal site. The site was unused from 1982 to the creation of the Nature Reserve in 2008 with a grant from Better Belfast.



## A SUPPORTIVE HABITAT

Beach Road Nature Reserve is home to a wide range of birds, insects and plants. To discover just a few of its inhabitants – stop, look and listen. The colonisation of the quarry by trees, shrubs and wildflowers has created a home for a diversity of birds and insects. A wildflower meadow boasting a rich mix of flora and fauna has been created to further enhance the site. Wildflower meadows are an important habitat for many species of insect, bird and mammals. Insects need specific plants on which to feed and lay their eggs.

## BUTTERFLIES

The environment of dense hedging, trees and wildflowers at Beach Road Nature Reserve attracts a variety of butterflies. Butterflies need sugar-rich nectar to feed on, and they also need particular plants on which to lay their eggs. There is a good selection of flowers and plants here to provide food for butterflies and caterpillars.

**Orange Tip** (flies April-June) & **Green-veined White** (seen in spring and mid-summer) both lay eggs on lady's smock, hedge garlic and hedge mustard.

**Large White** (flies May-September) prefers wild and cultivated cabbages.

**Small Tortoiseshell** (seen March-October) love flowers in a sunny position, and lay their eggs on stinging nettles growing in sheltered, sunny patches which can be found in the middle of the quarry.

## BIRDS

Many different bird species are attracted to the Nature Reserve because it provides shelter and plentiful food supply such as seeds, berries, small insects and grubs.

Look out for Song Thrush, Robin, Chaffinch, Wren, Fulmar, Blackbird, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Reed Bunting, Redpoll, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Goldcrest, Mistle Thrush, Woodpigeon, Bullfinch, Coal Tit, Raven, Rock Pipit, Meadow Pipit and Dunnock. These are all species that are found in the quarry and the adjacent coastline. Most are resident and can be seen all year round. Willow warbler, whitethroat, house martin and swift are summer visitors to the quarry and can only be seen between April and September.

### Fulmar

The quarry supports a population of as many as 20 pairs of fulmar. Often mistaken for gulls, fulmars hold their wings more stiffly and straighter when gliding and soaring. They can also be identified by their distinctive cackling call as they wave their heads and bow at their mates or rivals when sitting on the cliff ledges. Fulmars are seen from January to August and live on a seafood diet of crustaceans, squid, fish and offal.



### Raven

The raven is the largest of all crows, with a heavy cudgel-shaped bill. Their diet ranges from carrion to beetles. The raven's nest is a massive structure which is rebuilt each year with new material. Ravens nest early in the season, and can usually be seen around the quarry between February and April.

## Peregrine Falcon

The Peregrine Falcon the largest and most spectacular of our resident falcons is one of the most interesting and notorious species that is in the Nature Reserve. Peregrines are widely admired as spectacular aerial assailants; they usually attack their prey in mid-air after spotting a victim from a high vantage point. They 'stoop' in a steep power dive on nearly closed wings reaching speeds of 180km/hr or more, killing the prey with a blow to the head with the foot. They feed almost exclusively on other birds, but occasionally hunt small mammals such as bats, rats and rabbits. Perhaps the variety of birds along Belfast Lough makes Whitehead Nature Reserve the best home!



## NATIVE VERSUS NON-NATIVE

The colonisation of the quarry with trees, shrubs and wildflowers has created a home for a wide range of birds and insects. The species rich Reserve is the home of many native and non-native species.

### Non-Native Species

- Fuchsia is valuable as a rich source of nectar for bees and insects
- Buddleia is known as the 'Butterfly Bush' because it attracts butterflies to feed.
- Cotoneaster provides berries in spring favoured by thrushes visiting Northern Ireland on their journey back to Scandinavia.
- Sycamore provides food and shelter to woodland birds and supports many insects.



### Native Species

- Species - rich grassland supports a range of wildflowers and associated insects and birds, particularly butterflies and grasshoppers.
- Semi-mature ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) wood in the north west of the quarry has an understory of hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*).
- Species-rich maritime grassland can be found along the coastal section.
- Along the quarry and coastal path can be found wood vetch (*Vicia sylvatica*), a notable species quite restricted in Ireland. In Northern Ireland it is largely confined to the coast, especially where basalt and chalk occurs.

