

# BIODIVERSITY on your Farm

Species Profile # 20

The National Biodiversity Data Centre has set a challenge for farmers to record some of the amazing biodiversity found on your farm during the year. We have 40 species for you to record.

Are you up for the challenge?

## Species: Ragged-Robin

Scientific Name: *Silene flos-cuculi*

Irish name: Lus sioda

### Group

1 of 67 species in Ireland in the flowering plant family *Caryophyllaceae*. Commonly called the pink family or carnation family.

Wildflowers of Ireland profile:

[Wildflower Ragged-Robin Irish Wild Flora Wildflowers of Ireland](#)

### How common on farms

Biodiversity surveys were carried out across 40 farms within the National Biodiversity Data Centre's 'Protecting Farmland Pollinators' EIP project (<https://biodiversityireland.ie/projects/protecting-farmland-pollinators/>). The 40 farms were chosen to reflect farms of differing types and intensity levels.

Ragged-Robin was recorded on one of the 40 farms.



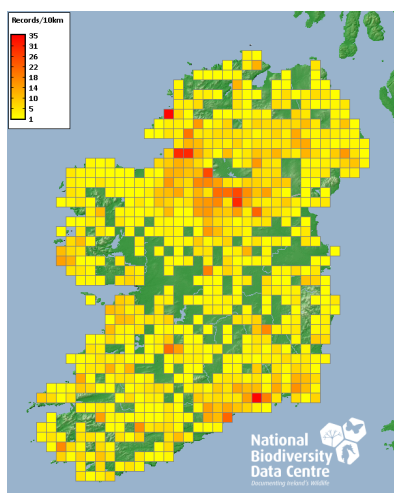
Ragged-Robin. Note: Reddish pink flowers, with 5 feathery petals.

### Identification Tips

- Reddish pink (occasionally white) flowers.
- 5 feathery petals, to help it withstand windy weather, narrow grass like leaves.
- Grows up to 75cm.
- Found in damp meadows or marsh areas.
- Flowers from May to August.
- A species in decline, due to habitat loss.

### Distribution

Widespread, but not common.



Source: The Ragged-Robin records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2023.

### Biodiversity Tip No. 20

Retain wetland meadows and pastures, they are a valuable habitat for biodiversity.



## Conservation Status

Red Lists are an internationally recognised methodology for assessing conservation status. An Irish Vascular Plant Red List was published in 2016. It found that the Ragged-Robin was not threatened with extinction from the island of Ireland. Based on the Red List it is 'Least Concern'.

Ragged-Robin is no longer as common as it once was due to the draining of marsh and wet grasslands.

## Management Tips

### *Wet grassland:*

On grazing pastures:

- Retain or develop the right level of grazing, at the right time of year, each farm will be different.
- Avoid overgrazing as this will lead to compaction and poaching.

On mowing meadows:

- Allow the meadow to mature and seed heads to form (mid to late July or into August) before cutting for hay or silage.
- After graze your meadow with livestock, this will help the sward structure and add some dung to the field.
- Control encroaching scrub, bramble, bracken or rush when they're young plants, in the winter months:
  - ♦ Scrub - hand cut or mulch (avoid heavy machinery or chemical control).
  - ♦ Rushes - top after August.
  - ♦ Bracken - cut with scythe or bruise with harrow when the fronds begin to unfurl and again 6 to 8 weeks after.

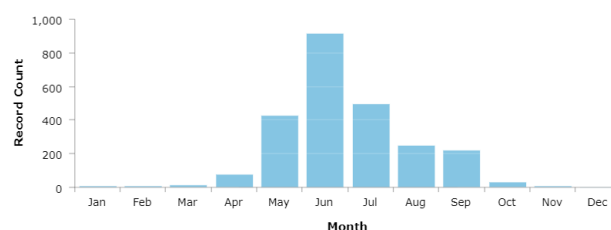
Wetlands and ponds:

- Retain or create wetland areas and ponds.
- Create a buffer zone to protect the wetland area/pond.
- Check out this useful 'Farming for Nature' information on protecting and creating wetlands and ponds for wildlife, [Wetlands, Ponds, & Waterways - Farming for Nature](#)

## When?

Can be seen between May and August.

### Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, Ragged-Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), image, accessed July 2023, <[Ragged-Robin \(Lychnis flos-cuculi\) - Detail - Biodiversity Maps \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](#)>

## Where on the farm?

Found in wet grassland (meadows and pasture), wetlands, at the edge of ponds, rivers, streams and drainage ditches, roadsides and open damp woodland.

## Value

- Species-rich wet grassland can provide a more varied herbage, this can be beneficial to grazing livestock as it provides them with a greater variety of vitamins, minerals and nutrients than 'improved' grasslands which support only a handful of species.
- Bumblebees, hoverflies and butterflies all forage from Ragged-Robin.
- Ragged-Robin is a caterpillar food plant for the Campion (*Sideridis rivularis*) and the Lychnis (*Hadena bicrurus*) moths.
- One specific feature of Ragged-Robin is that the root contains saponins. This soap substitute can be used for washing clothes, hair etc. and can be extracted by boiling the roots in water.
- In the language of flowers Ragged-Robin is a symbol of ardour and wit.

## Further Info

Ragged-Robin are found in wet grassland, which can be a common and extensive semi-natural grassland type in Ireland. Wet grassland species can also include abundant rushes (particularly soft rush), and also forget-me-nots and orchids.

They are much loved by long-tongued bumblebees (Early bumblebee, Buff-tailed bumblebee, Red-tailed bumblebee, Garden bumblebee and Common Carder bumblebee), hoverflies and butterflies (Common Blue) who feed on the nectar produced by the plant. Ragged-Robin is no longer as common as it once was due to the draining of marsh and wetlands.

As a clever mechanism against attack, the stalk of Ragged-Robin is covered with tiny downward-pointing hairs that prevent small insects such as ants climbing up the stalk and attacking the flower.

## Similar species

From a distance, similar to Red campion, but close up the flowers of Ragged-Robin are distinctively feathered.

## Affected by a change in climate?

They may be affected by extended dry spells and also, or longer periods of being saturated by water.

## Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:  
[pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie](mailto:pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie)

The Farmland Pollinator Officer post is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as one of its contributions to assisting implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025.



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



An Roinn Tithíochta,  
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta  
Department of Housing,  
Local Government and Heritage



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta  
agus Fiadhúlra  
National Parks and Wildlife Service

## Useful Links

Farming for Nature guidance:

[Wetlands, Ponds, & Waterways - Farming for Nature](#)  
[Species-rich grasslands management - Farming for Nature](#)

BRIDE project, Farming with nature has some guidance:

[Wet Grassland - The Bride Project](#)

## Record here

Your records will help us build a picture of farmland biodiversity in Ireland. If you're happy with your Ragged-Robin identification, you can submit your record:

- On our website at the National Biodiversity Data Centre: <https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/biodiversity-on-your-farm>

or

- You could also download our free smartphone App for recording in the field

*Android App:*

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=nbdm.mobile.biodiversity>

*iPhone App:*

<https://apps.apple.com/ie/app/biodiversity-data-capture/id906361120>