

Common Name: Narrow-leaved Helleborine

Scientific Name: *Cephalanthera longifolia*

Irish Name: *Cuaichín caol*

Also known as Sword-leaved Helleborine, this elegant member of the Orchidaceae family is a slender-stemmed plant which bears numerous strap-shaped dark green leaves, the largest at its base. On its narrow 25mm to 60mm long stalk it carries some beautiful pure white 12mm long, bell-shaped flowers, each with a small bract. Through June and July, graceful spikes of between three and twenty flowers open and in each is an orange spot at the base of the lip. This native plant is considered to be rare here and is protected under the 1999 Flora Protection Order in the Republic of Ireland. In the UK it is classed as vulnerable.

This beautiful plant is part of the Orchid family and as such has a distinctive way of becoming pollinated. The flower has an open mouth and on the lower lip is a 'landing pad' for bees. When the bee lands, the mouth is forced further open to accommodate the insect as it goes in search of nectar. Then the mouth closes and the bee has to turn around and force its way back to the opening, and in doing so it gets covered in pollen. When it is free, it flies off to another flower and in repeating the search for nectar, the pollen gets spread onto the next blossom. I recorded and photographed this wildflower near Woodford, County Galway in 2010, through the great kindness of Jackie O'Connell, who gave me directions to this plant. They were in perfect condition and a joy to behold. Jackie drove over to see them two days later but, due to their position right on the side of the road, they had been flattened by the wheels of a motor vehicle. I am told that they have appeared again, in the same place. ■



Cephalanthera longifolia

ZOË DEVLIN

Zoë Devlin is passionate about wildflowers and the environment. She combined her interests in botany and photography by developing the website: www.wildflowersofireland.net.

Zoë's book [The Wildflowers of Ireland - A Field Guide](#) is published by The Collins Press, and is available in all good bookshops and online from: www.collinspress.ie

Recommended for all orchidists and wildflower lovers.