

Connemara mare and foal make trip from Kylemore Abbey to Áras an Uachtaráin as part of new biodiversity partnership.

On Monday morning, Gray Lass (affectionately known as “Snowy”) and her colt foal along with a small delegation of Kylemore Abbey Staff made the 280km journey from Kylemore Abbey in Connemara to Áras an Uachtaráin in the Phoenix Park. “Snowy” and her six-week-old foal will take up residence in the front paddock of Áras an Uachtaráin for four months. The partnership between Kylemore Abbey and Áras an Uachtaráin forms part of wider individual biodiversity management plans for both Áras an Uachtaráin and Kylemore Abbey while also providing the ideal opportunity to showcase the beautiful native Connemara pony breed. This comes at a busy time for Kylemore Abbey as the popular visitor attraction prepares to reopen on June 4th for the first time in almost nine months.

First announced in November, the partnership, will see a mare and foal from the Kylemore herd spend four months each year in the care of the Army Equitation school. At the invitation of Kylemore Abbey, President Michael D. Higgins named the colt foal, Kylemore’s first born in 2021, *Peaceful Aimhirgin*, named after Aimhirgin Gluingheal mac Mileadh, the Milesian warrior-poet of Irish mythology who is said to have defeated the Tuatha Dé Danann. The summer grazing of Connemara ponies at Áras an Uachtaráin is part of a programme of work developing a conservation plan for the grounds of Áras an Uachtaráin, to implement the recommendations of a recent biodiversity audit commissioned by President Higgins

The Kylemore herd of Connemara ponies, all of whom carry the apt prefix “Peaceful” have proved very popular with visitors in the three short years since their arrival. In 2020 the first ever Connemara foal was born on the Victorian estate which has been home to a Benedictine order of Nuns since 1920. A key edict of the Benedictine nuns’ ethos, in keeping with Pope Francis’ encyclical letter “Laudato Si’”, is the protection of the planet. The addition of the ponies to the estate and this exciting partnership is one of the ways in which Kylemore Abbey is working towards creating a hub of biodiversity and sustainable tourism on its iconic 1,000-acre estate. Speaking about the partnership, Kylemore Abbey’s Executive Director Conor Coyne said “We are excited and truly honoured that our national breed will have such an important and prominent showcase. The Connemara ponies are a much-loved part of the Kylemore Abbey family and the birth of new foals has become a greatly anticipated event each spring. ‘Snowy’ has had her first foal this April and where better for her to take care of her spritely colt than in the Áras paddock this summer”.

Connemara ponies are renowned for their gentle disposition and eight-year-old “Snowy” is a testament to this. While “Snowy” and “Aimhirgin” are grazing happily in the Áras, visitors to Kylemore Abbey will still have the opportunity to meet the rest of the Connemara ponies, including three new foals and learn more about this fascinating breed from new interpretative signage set along the pony paddock.

The annual seasonal placement of the mare and foal in a position of such prominence is also a significant opportunity to promote Ireland’s native pony breed. The Connemara Pony Breeders’ Society (CPBS) is responsible for preserving and promoting the breed. CPBS President, Anne Marie Conroy, attending yesterday’s event said “As president of the Connemara Pony Breeders’ Society I am very proud to see a Connemara mare and foal take up Summer residence at Áras an Uachtaráin. The Connemara pony

plays a large role in Irish heritage and it is fitting that our native breed, who originated in the West of Ireland, should graze the grounds of the home of our esteemed President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins. I congratulate Kylemore Abbey on initiating this symbolic partnership and I hope “Snowy” and her foal enjoy their stay at the Áras”.

Kylemore Abbey which welcomes approximately 560,000 people annually has been preparing for another year of domestic tourism by expanding its outdoor offering with the launch of the Kylemore Woodland’s Trails and Tales - which encourages visitors to explore the flora, fauna, and folklore by taking them through previously unseen pastures and woodlands into the very heart of the 1000-acre estate and demonstrates the rich tapestry of wildlife that thrives in this diverse pocket of Connemara.

For more information and to book tickets, please visit www.kylemoreabbey.com