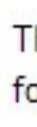
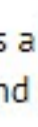
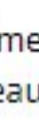
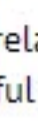


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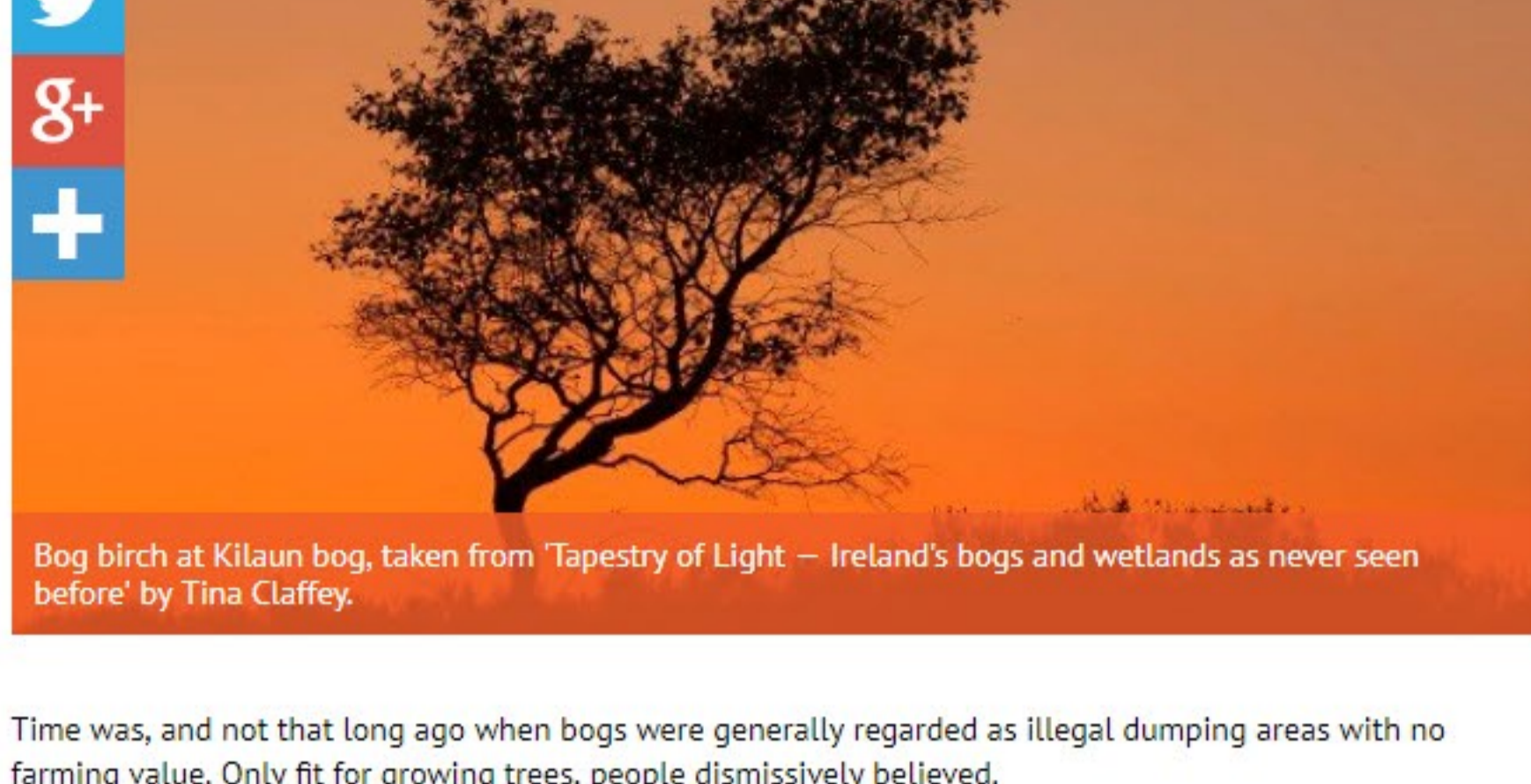
Book of stunning images captures the magic of bogs

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Monday, November 06, 2017

Donal Hickey

There was a time Ireland's raised bogs were considered to be of little worth but now their value as a refuge for rare and beautiful plant and animal species is recognised across the world, writes **Donal Hickey**



Bog birch at Kilaun bog, taken from 'Tapestry of Light – Ireland's bogs and wetlands as never seen before' by Tina Claffey.

Time was, and not that long ago when bogs were generally regarded as illegal dumping areas with no farming value. Only fit for growing trees, people dismissively believed.

The result is that much of our peatland has become forestry over the past 40 years.

But attitudes are changing as more people come to value disappearing bogs as repositories of rare plant and animal life; last refuges of the curlew and red grouse and wintering havens for Greenland white-fronted geese among other birds.

Of the raised bogs that started to form in Ireland around 10,000 years, only one per cent remains. But we still hold around 50% of Europe's intact bogs. All of which means there's a heavy responsibility on this country to save what's left and attempt to restore what's been severely damaged.

Tina Claffey, a photographic artist and graduate of the Crawford College of Art and Design, in Cork, admits she had to go far away to Africa before coming to appreciate the natural treasures of the bogs among which she grew up.



Four-spotted chaser at Abbeyleix bog, taken from 'Tapestry of Light – Ireland's bogs and wetlands as never seen before' by Tina Claffey.

Her memories of the bog as a child were of hard work and aching muscles. Her father would cut turf by hand on his small plot in Co Westmeath, slicing deep into the black peat with his sleán, layer by layer.

Later, she worked as a photographer in Kenya and Botswana, where she was assigned to a documentary on flamingo migration, before returning to her hometown of Birr, Co Offaly, in 2009.

A field walk with botanist and broadcaster John Feehan in the local Killaun bog proved to be a different bog experience, as he pointed out mosses and tiny plants to her. "It was an epiphany for me," she recalled.

"Here, on my very own doorstep, was a whole other world of nature. A wilderness with as much significance as the Kalahari itself. I returned there with my camera the very next day."



Young stag in flight at Kilaun bog, taken from 'Tapestry of Light – Ireland's bogs and wetlands as never seen before' by Tina Claffey.

Ms Claffey went there many days with her camera and also explored several other midland bogs. She purchased a Canon 100mm macro lens, which captured the intricate beauty of many things in detail invisible to the naked eye.

The result is a new book, **Tapestry of Light – Ireland's bogs and wetlands as never seen before**. Her photographs highlight the habitat value of raised bogs, their diversity of flora such as bog-rosemary, cranberries, lichens and sundews, and wildlife including butterflies, moths, dragonflies and frogs.

One of the standout images is of the glorious sundew, an orange, red and green plant which preys on midges and other insects, trapping them on its sticky tentacles. Close-ups of colourful butterflies and the grey partridge also catch the eye.

In a foreword, John Feehan remarks that in an era when everybody has a digital camera most photography can be described as "thoughtless clicking". But nature photography works on a deeper level, calling for patient work to find that hidden meaning.



Turkey-tail fungus at Abbeyleix bog, taken from 'Tapestry of Light – Ireland's bogs and wetlands as never seen before' by Tina Claffey.

"Tina Claffey's photography is a lesson in the art of observation," he noted. "She gives complete attention to the minutiae of the flora and fauna."

Matthijs Schouten, ecologist and founder of the Dutch Foundation for the Conservation of Irish Bogs, launched the book.

"Never before have I seen the magic of bogs captured so beautifully. The photographs and poems lead us into a truly enchanted world," he said.

Professor of restoration ecology at Wageningen University, he is also an adjunct professor at UCC.



Bog cotton, taken from 'Tapestry of Light – Ireland's bogs and wetlands as never seen before' by Tina Claffey.

Tapestry of Light – Ireland's bogs and wetlands as never seen before, published by Artisan House, is enhanced by John Sheahan, best known as a fiddle player and long-time member of The Dubliners.

The title is taken from one of the poems, Tapestry of Light.