



“

When I said I was an illustrator, I just felt like a weight had been lifted off and I just started focusing on that and building my portfolio

”

concentrate solely on her passion for drawing.

“When I said I was an illustrator, I just felt like a weight had been lifted off and I just started focusing on that and building my portfolio,” says Melissa. “And that’s when all of a sudden Gill Books came along.”

The publisher had seen a poster that Melissa had designed for the Irish Wildlife Trust and thought she would be perfect to illustrate a new nature book they were developing.

Written by architect and environmentalist Michael Fewer, *Naturama* explores Ireland’s flora and fauna through every season from the back garden and local park to the country and seaside, and is crammed with fun facts. In what was a dream commission, Melissa was tasked with bringing the information to life with her illustrations, which she did through a series of field trips from the Botanic Gardens in Dublin to the home farm, as well as studying photos and wildlife videos.

“Even though you’re just drawing one picture, I could get a sense of what their movements were like and I think that made it way more fun,” she explains.

Now on general release, Melissa hopes the book will encourage a new generation to leave the iPads aside and get out and explore.

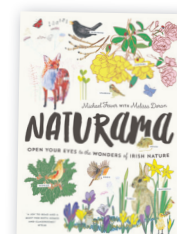
“If you kind of start getting interested in nature, you’re never going to run out of new things to learn or new things to notice,” she says.

“And the thing with the book is that it’s a really good starting point. Michael chose the most common plants, animals, birds, so you’re more likely to see a lot of them if you start looking and I think that gives you great encouragement.”

Plans are now in the pipeline for an activity book to accompany *Naturama*, while Melissa’s schedule includes a series of Let’s Create art monthly workshops for adults, free drawing meet-ups in Dublin and her ongoing digital illustration classes.

Meanwhile, on 13-14 August, she will be going back to her roots at the Wild Words children’s book festival in Carrick-On-Shannon, where she and Michael will be giving a *Naturama*-inspired nature journal workshop for families, while she will also lead a “monster doodle” session on the theme of nature. **CL**

Visit [www.goradiate.ie](http://www.goradiate.ie) or follow on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram *Naturama* by Michael Fewer with Melissa Doran is published by Gill Books (RRP €22.99)



# Living colour

After discovering architecture was not for her, farmer’s daughter Melissa Doran followed her heart to become an illustrator. And with *Naturama*, her career is blooming, writes **Maria Moynihan**

[mmoynihn@farmersjournal.ie](mailto:mmoynihn@farmersjournal.ie)

**A**s a child, one of Melissa Doran’s favourite things was to pull on her wellies and spend hours exploring the family farm in Co Leitrim with her nature journal. And this summer, it’s like life has come full circle with the release of *Naturama*, a nature book for the young – and young at heart – written by Michael Fewer and lovingly brought to life with illustrations by the emerging artist.

The youngest of seven children of Jim and Bridie Doran, Melissa grew up on a suckler farm near Leitrim village, which is now run by her brother, Colm.

“I had so much space to wander and have huge adventures,” she recalls warmly of her childhood. “I used to keep nature journals from when I was 10 or 11.”

Despite a love of the natural world, however, Melissa chose a different path after school by deciding to study

architecture, but soon realised it was not for her.

“The architecture course didn’t suit me particularly,” she says. “I really wasn’t happy in it at all, but I think I was trying to be sensible and get a ‘real job’ and do something definite. I didn’t even consider the fact that I could be an illustrator. It wasn’t on my radar at all, even though I loved drawing.”

While Melissa completed the initial degree, she admits to feeling “completely lost” by the end of the course. However, the decision to do a master’s in digital media design reignited her confidence and creativity, and having graduated in 2010, she set up her own business, Go Radiate.

In the early days, Melissa concentrated on website design and services for new businesses, but after completing an online course called Make Art That Sells, she took a leap of faith to