



Clare Biodiversity Action Plan



This publication outlines the aims and objectives of the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan. The associated Habitat and Species Action Plans (in preparation) will identify specific targets for the future.

The Clare Biodiversity Group is a voluntary steering body for the implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan in the county.

This is your plan and we hope that you will help us to implement it by getting involved.

For more information go to -

www.clarelibrary.ie - and follow the Heritage and Biodiversity links
www.clarebiodiversity.ie

An action under the County Clare Heritage Plan 2003-2007
is the publication of this Clare Biodiversity Action Plan

In the Heritage Plan objective B1 is to conserve the natural biodiversity (habitat, species and genetic diversity) of the county and across all sectors. Action 1.1 of the Heritage Plan is to Prepare a Local Area Biodiversity Action Plan (LABAP) with the framework of the National Heritage Plan and National Biodiversity Plan.

Other Biodiversity Publications Produced by Clare Biodiversity Group are:

- Spot the 101 Habitats and Species in Clare: Biodiversity in County Clare (booklet)
- Explore the Biodiversity of County Clare (a CD-ROM for primary schools)
- Recording the Wildlife of County Clare (booklet)
- Clare Bluebells (brochure)
- Wonderfully Wild: Books on the Biodiversity of Clare (leaflet)

All are available free of charge from the Biodiversity Officer or Heritage Officer, Clare County Council
see contact details below

The Biodiversity or Heritage Officer
Economic Development and Planning Department,
Clare County Council, Unit 1, Westgate Business Park,
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What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the variety of all life. It includes everything from the smallest microbe to the largest whale, from a blade of grass or single flower to large areas of woodland. Biodiversity may be viewed at three separate levels: habitats, species, and genetic diversity. Simply, it does not just include wildlife, it also includes domestic and farm animals, crops and even our pets.

Why should we Conserve it?

The gift of Biodiversity

Biodiversity provides us with a great variety of products and services. It gives us food, fuel, medicines, building materials and our beautiful countryside, landscape and sea. It also helps to purify our air and water, and to stabilise our soil. It provides for the tourism and recreation activities of walking, cycling, angling, boating and bird and whale watching. The conservation of biodiversity is life enhancing and of economic, cultural, social and health value. We also have a moral responsibility to look after all habitats and species for future generations.



Biodiversity makes Clare unique

The combination of wild places, beautiful scenery, and wildlife makes County Clare unique:

- The Burren in the north of the county with its limestone pavement landscape and grassland habitats. It is home to rare and unusual plants such as the Dark-red Helleborine, Autumn Lady's Tresses and the Spring Gentian; whilst Pine Martens, rare fungi and lichens inhabit hazel scrub and woodlands. On lower ground turloughs empty and fill seasonally providing important grazing for cattle and habitat for rare flowers such as the Turlough Violet.
- In west Clare the sandstone strata of the sea cliffs provide breeding platforms for sea birds such as the Guillemot, Kittiwake and Fulmar. Resident Choughs feed on insects living on the cliff top grasslands; migrant Puffins breed on the Cliffs of Moher, and, during winter, Barnacle geese fly in from north Greenland to feed on the rich grasses of Mutton Island. The sea cliffs of west Clare are geologically unique.
- In east Clare, the blanket bogs of Slieve Bearnagh and Slieve Aughty are the home of myriads of insects, and woodlands. The lower slopes are carpeted with bluebells and wood anemones. Most are fringed by wetlands and Lough Derg is home to rare fish such as the Pollan, one of Ireland's most unique species.
- In central and south Clare and around Ennis the karstic limestone landscape has been eroded and smoothed by glaciers into natural parklands through which the River Fergus and its tributaries now flow.

This biodiversity is what gives Clare its character and charm. This not only provides us with our beautiful landscape to live in and enjoy but it is also these features that attract tourists to Clare.

Biodiversity is disappearing

Rapid and extensive changes are currently occurring in habitats throughout the world, causing a serious decline in biodiversity. Species are becoming extinct as habitats are being destroyed. At least 11,000 species worldwide are known to be in danger of becoming extinct. In Europe, more than half the wetlands have been lost. In Ireland, less than 20% of our bogs remain intact, and about 12% of plants and 18% of vertebrates are endangered. In Clare species such as the Arctic Char, Corn Cockerle, Cornflower and the Nightjar are now thought to be extinct.

The main cause of the loss of biodiversity is human activity. Development, transport, agriculture, forestry, pollution, tourism, recreation and the introduction of alien species, all have a serious impact on our biodiversity. Although we need to work with biodiversity to live, we can learn to do this in a more sustainable way, thereby causing as little damage as possible.



What is a Local Biodiversity Action Plan?

County Clare contains a rich biodiversity. The most effective way to achieve awareness and conservation of biodiversity at the local level is through a Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The process of producing and implementing a Local Biodiversity Action Plan is equally as important as the plan itself. Raising awareness of and involving people in biodiversity is critical for the successful conservation of local biodiversity. Implementation of the Local Biodiversity Plan is ongoing, and it must be continuously added to and updated. The production of the plan will be in partnership with as many different organisations and individuals with an interest in biodiversity as possible.



Steps in the production of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan

- Establish a biodiversity working group
- Raise awareness of biodiversity
- Gather information on the biodiversity of the area
- Consult with stakeholders and landowners
- Establish priorities and set targets and actions
- Identify how the targets and actions will be achieved
- Produce Biodiversity Action Plan
- Monitor and review

This table is based on Guidelines for the Production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (draft) prepared by the Heritage Council.

Clare Heritage Plan 2003 - 2007

In Clare, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan began with the County Clare Heritage Plan (2003 - 2007), which was adopted by the County Council following public consultation. The key objectives of the Clare Heritage Plan are to collect and make available heritage information, inform public policy on heritage and promote strategic and integrated management of heritage at a local level, and to demonstrate best practice in heritage conservation and raising awareness through education initiatives. The Plan consists of many objectives and actions relating to natural heritage, including the preparation of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The Clare County Development Plan 2005 states that when considering the effects of development on habitats and species, regard will be taken of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Heritage Forum was established to develop and manage the implementation of the Clare Heritage Plan and comprises representatives of relevant groups, including local government bodies, development organisations, state agencies, landowners, heritage organisations and the community and voluntary sector. As part of the Heritage Forum a Natural Heritage Working Group was established and this working group has evolved into the Clare Biodiversity Group, which is leading the Biodiversity Local Action Plan. This Group is formed of members from governmental and non governmental organisations and expert individuals from within the county.



National and International Agreements

A Local Biodiversity Action Plan is driven locally but it also meets part of the national and international obligations of Ireland to conserve biodiversity. In 1992 the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity was signed and ratified by more than 180 countries. The three main goals of the Rio Convention are (1). The conservation of biodiversity, (2). The sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and (3). The sharing of the benefits arising from commercial and any other utilisation of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way. Local Agenda 21 requires that the Local Authority consults with local communities about strategies and plans for development.

As part of Ireland's responsibility under this international convention, a National Biodiversity Plan was published in 2002. It requires that each Local Authority prepare a Local Biodiversity Action Plan in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and to designate a contact officer for natural heritage matters in its area. The National Parks and Wildlife Service are responsible for the implementation of the National Biodiversity Plan.



Funding

The Heritage Council provides the opportunity for Local Authorities to apply for funding for natural heritage actions, including the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans. The involvement of local communities is an important part of the development and implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The Heritage Council also provides the opportunity for community groups and other organisations to apply for capital funding for biodiversity projects.

Aim of the Clare Local Biodiversity Action Plan

The main aim is to 'conserve the biodiversity of County Clare'.

This will be achieved by prioritising, co-ordinating and initiating action to ensure the effective conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in County Clare and by raising awareness and appreciation of local biodiversity, through involving local communities in its conservation and by informing policy.

Objectives and Actions

Objective: Establish priorities for the conservation of biodiversity of local, national and international importance.

- Produce Habitat and Species Action Plans on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure the effective implementation of Habitat and Species Action Plans produced.
- Resources will be focussed to conserve biodiversity by working in partnership with the relevant organisations.

Objective: Raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity in County Clare.

- Hold a Clare Biodiversity Day annually.
- Deliver an education programme to a wide variety of sectors.
- Publish awareness raising material through a variety of media including web sites, newspapers, radio and publications.
- Encourage active local community involvement in the conservation of biodiversity.

Objective: Identify, assess and manage the local biodiversity resource.

- Further develop the Clare biological database, Clare Biological Records Centre and the web site.
- Carry out surveys of habitats and species prioritised in the Action Plans.
- Promote, encourage and support the collection of data at the county level.

Objective: Promote the conservation of biodiversity in plans and programmes affecting the county.

- Inform and input into the Clare Heritage Plan, the County Development Plan, Local Area Plans and other plans and programmes.
- Support other local biodiversity projects and efforts

Objective: Co-ordinate existing and new biodiversity initiatives.

- Continue to develop and maintain partnerships with organisations and individuals involved in biodiversity in Clare.

Objective: Monitor and review progress of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

- Monitor and review the Local Biodiversity Action Plan on an ongoing basis.
- Report on progress every 2 years.



Clare Biodiversity Group - Achievements to Date

- A Biodiversity Project Manager was appointed in October 2003.

Raising Awareness

- A publication entitled **Spot the 101 Habitats and Species in Clare: Biodiversity in Clare** was produced, and has been widely distributed.
- A bluebell survey has taken place, which encouraged the public to record their blue bell sightings in Clare. The results have been collated and a leaflet **Clare Bluebells** mapping their distribution produced.
- Web pages on biodiversity have been developed in partnership with Clare Library.
- A **Biodiversity Quiz** based on the web site has been running in schools in the county.
- A fun family day out the **Clare Biodiversity Day** has been held for two years, and will now become an annual event.
- The biodiversity resources in all the libraries in the county were increased, and a **book promotion** (including a leaflet of book reviews) has toured the libraries in Clare.
- **Seashore Field Trips** for Schools have been organised at a number of locations along the coast of Clare.
- A CD-ROM for primary schools **Explore the Biodiversity of County Clare** has been developed and will be distributed to all schools in the county.
- **Birdwatch in the School Yard** project has been run in all schools in the county.
- **Enhancing your School Yard** project was run in ten schools in the county by the Local Authority.
- A weekly column **Nature's Way**, on habitats and species found in the county, was run over two years in the Clare Champion.



Clare Biological Records Centre

- An audit of the sources of information on the biodiversity of the county has taken place and a database established.
- A Recorder based biological database has been established. This database is linked to a web site, which then provides information on species in the county including interactive distribution maps, descriptions and photographs of the species.

www.clarebiodiversity.ie

Community Involvement

- Training sessions on Wildlife in Your Locality were held in several communities throughout Clare.
- Talks on biodiversity were delivered as part of the Teagasc REPS training courses.
- The Heritage and Biodiversity Officer works with and supports many community groups and NGOs in the county with the development of projects, events etc



Habitat Map and Surveys

- A habitat map has been produced for the county based on Corine landcover data
- Habitat surveys have been carried out in some parts of the county including Fanore, Ennis, Shannon and Sixmilebridge area.

Establishing Priorities and Targets

- Habitat and Species Action Plans have been drafted and will be piloted for the following habitats and species:
 - Sand dunes
 - Fens
 - Leisler bat
 - Cuckoo
 - Fly orchid
 - Pollan



Future Work Planned in the Short Term

Raise Awareness

- Biodiversity Day will be held in May.
- Field trips will be provided for schools to seashores, fens and lakes.
- The online Biodiversity Quiz for schools will continue.

Clare Biological Records Centre

- More data for the county will be obtained and entered on the web site.
- A survey of cuckoos in Clare will be carried out.
- Training and support will be provided to recorders.
- The interactive web site will be further developed.

Community Involvement

- Workshops and training sessions will be delivered to community groups throughout the county. This will help communities examine their local biodiversity and what they can do to enhance it.

Establishing Priorities and Targets

- Workshops on habitats and habitat action plans will be delivered.
- More habitat action plans will be developed and implemented.

Habitat Surveys

- Habitat surveys and maps will be produced for the county on an ongoing basis.



Threatened Habitats and Species in Clare

Criteria have been developed to assess the habitats and species in County Clare. Using these criteria the following important habitats and species within County Clare were identified, many of which are under serious threat. They are not placed in order of importance.

Habitats:

Bogs. Areas of thick or deep peat.

Brackish water. Lagoons, saline lakes and tidal rivers.

Caves. Underground caverns formed by water or wind erosion or solution.

Exposed rock. Limestone pavement and any other bare rock.

Fens. Peat-forming wetlands found in low-lying areas and beside water such as rivers or lakes.

Grasslands (semi-natural). Grasslands that have not been intensively managed or cultivated.

Heath. Dry, shrubby acid peatlands usually found in upland areas or formed on sandy coastal plains.

Lakes and ponds. Still areas of water other than watercourses.

Littoral rock and sediment. Sandy, muddy, rocky and shingle shores.

Marsh. Very wet areas without standing water. They contain a diversity of wetland plants.

Open water. The open sea not including the shore.

Salt marshes. Areas of grassy mud or sand that are regularly flooded by sea water at high tide.

Sand dunes. A complex of mounds of sand, sandy grasslands and dune slacks (wet hollows).

Sea cliffs. Cliffs on the coast.

Shingle and gravel banks. Banks of gravel, cobbles or pebbles accumulated on a shore or beach.

Springs. The point where water wells up from underground.

Swamps. Wet areas with standing water, found usually at the edge of open water such as a lake or river.

Watercourses. Rivers, canals, other channels, turloughs and other temporary water bodies.

Woodlands (semi-natural). Formed mainly of native trees.



Fauna:

Barn Owl. A nocturnal golden-buff medium owl with a white front and face.

Bottlenose Dolphin. Large grey marine mammal with a pronounced beak-like nose.

Brown Hairstreak. A dark brown butterfly with bright orange streaks.

Chough. A black medium-sized member of the crow family with a red beak and red legs.

Greenland White-fronted Goose. A grey goose with a broad white forehead.

Hen Harrier. A moderately large bird of prey with a prominent white rump.

Kingfisher. A small bright blue and orange bird with a long stout bill, found near watercourses.

Large Heath. A brown butterfly with dark spots towards the edge of the wings.

Marsh Fritillary. A mottled black, orange and white butterfly.

Pearl-bordered Fritillary. An orange and black butterfly, pale silver spotted underneath.

Pollan. Rare hering-like silvery freshwater fish.

Red Grouse. A large, dark red-brown bird with a small head, and heavy whirring flight.

Salmon. A silver bodied fish ranging from light silver to almost black.

Short-eared Owl. A diurnal buff-coloured medium-sized migrant owl with pale face and long wings.

Tree Sparrow. Similar to, but slightly smaller than the much more common house sparrow. It has a chocolate brown head and a black ear spot.

Twite. A small dark brown member of the linnet family found in uplands.

Whooper Swan. A large swan with a mostly yellow bill and a strong upright neck.

Yellowhammer. A small yellow and brown bunting, with a characteristic call.



Yellowhammer



Bottlenose Dolphin



Barn Owl



Greenland White-fronted Geese



Marsh Fritillary

Flora:

Cowslip. Large hairy basal leaves with heads of several yellow bell shaped flowers.

Fly orchid. A tall orchid with small sparse fly-like flowers.

Hairy Violet. Hairy leaves and small purple flowers.

Irish Fleabane/Willow-leaved Inula. A plant with narrow willow like leaves and yellow daisy like flowers.

Small-white Orchid. A very small creamy-white flowered orchid.

Spindle. A small tree with narrow oval leaves, green flowers in the summer and pink fruits in the autumn.

Triangular Clubrush. A rush with triangular leaves.

Clare Biodiversity Group

The Clare Biodiversity Group is a voluntary steering body for the implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan in the county.

Members of the Biodiversity Group are:

Dr. Simon Berrow (Chairperson) - Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation

Ute Bohnsack - Consultant Ecologist

Ken Bond - University College Cork

Bridget Carlin - Irish Seed Savers

Michael Davoren - Irish Farmers Association

Dr. Brendan Dunford - Burrenbeo and Burren LIFE project

John Flanagan - The Forest Service

Emma Glanville - National Parks and Wildlife Service

Doirín Graham - Rural Resource Development, Clare

Fran Igoe - Irish Char Conservation Group / Shannon Regional Fisheries Board

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Declan Murphy - Teagasc, Department of Agriculture

John N. Murphy - Birdwatch Ireland

Ciara O'Mahony - National Parks and Wildlife Service

Graham Webb - Senior Executive Planner, Clare County Council

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