



**Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall**
Donegal County Council



Ceangal

Clár den Chomhairle Oidhreachta
A Heritage Council programme

Draft County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan 2026 - 2030



Acknowledgements

Donegal County Council wish to express sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the development of the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan 2026–2030. Special thanks go to The Heritage Council for their guidance and partnership, through the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme, the County Donegal Biodiversity Working Group and the County Donegal Heritage Forum for their invaluable advice and support, and to the many stakeholders, community groups, and members of the public who participated in consultations and shared their insights. The dedication and expertise of all involved have been instrumental in shaping a plan that reflects the collective ambition to protect and restore County Donegal’s rich natural heritage for current and future generations.



Front cover illustration by Robert Vaughan

Inside Illustration: Red-throated Diver by Robert Vaughan

Forewords

Foreword – CEO of DCC, John McLaughlin

Foreword - Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council

Foreword – The Heritage Council

Contents

Executive Summary.....	5
Chapter 1: Understanding Biodiversity	6
1.1 What is Biodiversity?.....	6
1.2 Why is Biodiversity important?	6
Chapter 2: Biodiversity in County Donegal.....	9
2.1 Designated Sites in County Donegal	9
2.2 Key Habitats in Donegal	12
Chapter 3: The Biodiversity Crisis	21
3.1 State of Nature in Ireland	21
3.2 What are the problems facing biodiversity?.....	22
Chapter 4: Policy Framework for Developing the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan	25
4.1 Developing the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan	25
4.2 Legislative and Policy Context	28
Chapter 5: Biodiversity Case Studies in County Donegal.....	35
5.1 Corncrake LIFE Project.....	35
5.2 LIFE on Machair	35
5.3 Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE	36
5.4 Breeding Waders EIP.....	36
5.5 LAWPRO Programmes	36
5.6 Donegal County Council Projects	37
Chapter 6: County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan	41
6.1 Theme 1: Data Collection, Mapping and Research.....	42
6.2 Theme 2: Embedding Biodiversity into Council Operations through Policy and Training..	44
6.3 Theme 3: Policy into Practice - How we integrate biodiversity into our work practices	46
6.4 Theme 4: Increasing the awareness and connection to County Donegal's Biodiversity ...	49
6.5 Theme 5. Working in partnership with our communities and stakeholders.....	51
6.6 Making It Work - Governance, Funding and Long-Term Delivery	54
Chapter 7: Do Your Bit for Biodiversity	55
Chapter 8: Appendices.....	57
Appendix 1. Designated sites in County Donegal	57
Appendix 2. Glossary and Bibliography.....	61

Executive Summary

County Donegal's coasts, uplands, bogs, rivers, islands and farmland support a rich variety of wildlife and are central to the county's identity, wellbeing and economy. Like the rest of Ireland, however, Donegal is experiencing significant biodiversity loss driven by habitat change, pollution, climate change and invasive species. Ireland has declared a biodiversity emergency and, through the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan, the National Planning Framework and Ireland's Climate Action Plan, has committed to halting and reversing biodiversity loss in line with EU and global targets.

The County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan 2026 - 2030 is Donegal County Council's local response to these commitments and to its biodiversity duty under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act. It sets out a clear vision to protect, restore, and celebrate County Donegal's biodiversity, ensuring that nature thrives alongside people, and that future generations inherit a county rich in wildlife and healthy ecosystems. The County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan commits the Council to lead by example while recognising that it cannot achieve this alone. It aims to weave biodiversity into everyday decision-making and land management, but just as importantly, to support and enable others to take action for nature.

Over the next five years, the focus will be on improving knowledge and awareness, managing Council lands in more nature-friendly ways, reducing key pressures and building strong partnerships and local projects across the county. By providing an agreed framework, shared direction and practical support, the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan 2026 - 2030 is designed to turn concern for nature into coordinated, on-the-ground action.



Robin illustration © Robert Vaughan

Chapter 1: Understanding Biodiversity

1.1 What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth, and in County Donegal, it is all around us. County Donegal is renowned for its stunning landscapes, coastline and wide range of unique and special wildlife. These landscapes are jigsaws, made from a mosaic of important habitats like bogs and heathland, rivers and lakes, native woodlands, sand dunes, machair and more. Within these habitats, both rare and common species are found, making Donegal a special place but also an integral part of a network of habitats in Ireland that supports wider biodiversity. But biodiversity is in crisis. Across Ireland, habitats are declining, species are under threat, and the ecosystems we rely on are under pressure.

1.2 Why is Biodiversity important?

As human beings we are part of biodiversity, and our lives are interwoven with the natural world. Nature provides us with the essentials for survival: the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the materials we use for shelter and clothing. But beyond these basics, it also supports our mental and physical well-being, offers spaces for recreation and inspiration, and underpins our economies and cultures.

These benefits that we receive freely from healthy ecosystems are known as Ecosystem Services. They include:

- Provisioning services such as crops, timber, freshwater, and medicinal resources,
- Regulating services like climate regulation, pollination, water purification, and disease control,
- Cultural services including spiritual enrichment, well-being and enjoyment of nature, recreation, aesthetic experiences, and
- Supporting services such as soil formation, photosynthesis, and nutrient cycling, which are essential for all other services to function.

When biodiversity is rich and ecosystems are healthy, these services are abundant and resilient. But when biodiversity is degraded these services begin to break down, putting both nature and human well-being at risk.



Figure 1. Ecosystem Services Diagram © Ruth Graham

Despite Donegal and Ireland being home to a wonderful array of biodiversity, Ireland is facing serious challenges when it comes to protecting its biodiversity. According to Ireland’s Sixth National Report to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity¹:

- 91% of protected habitats are in poor or inadequate condition.
- More than half of these habitats are getting worse.
- 14% of species assessed are considered endangered.

In response to this growing concern, Dáil Éireann officially declared a biodiversity crisis on 9th May 2019. Globally, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)² has warned that the loss of biodiversity is just as serious a threat as the climate emergency.

Chapters 2&3 will explore further the biodiversity of Donegal and the threats facing it.

¹ Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2019, Ireland’s 6th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

² IPBES (2019): Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

1.3 Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan

A Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan provides a structured framework for conserving and enhancing biodiversity at the local level. It sets out objectives and actions that respond to both national and international commitments, while also reflecting regional priorities and local consultation.

The County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan (Donegal BAP) will guide Donegal County Council over the next five years, offering a clear direction for protecting and restoring biodiversity. Its vision is **to protect, restore, and celebrate County Donegal’s biodiversity, ensuring that nature thrives alongside people, and that future generations inherit a county rich in wildlife and healthy ecosystems.**

The Donegal BAP recognises that biodiversity underpins human health, the local economy, and overall quality of life. It outlines practical measures to conserve habitats, safeguard species, and strengthen resilience in the face of climate change. Importantly, it emphasises that biodiversity is everyone’s responsibility, encouraging participation from local authority decision-makers, planners, architects, engineers, politicians, developers, businesses, farmers, schools, faith groups, community organisations, and individual garden owners.

The Donegal BAP is underpinned by Ireland’s 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (2023–2030), which requires all local authorities to adopt biodiversity action plans by 2026 and promotes a “Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society” approach in line with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

The Donegal BAP is structured around five themes, five overarching objectives, and measurable actions and KPIs. It has been screened for Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment, and was informed by international, national, and local conservation strategies. Its development followed the Heritage Council’s Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Guidelines.

A more detailed account of the policy framework and approach to developing the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan can be found in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Biodiversity in County Donegal

County Donegal is renowned for its outstanding landscapes, from windswept upland bogs to the shimmering shores of the Atlantic Ocean. These places are alive with colour, sound, and life. But they're not just panoramas, they're living mosaics of habitats and species, intricately stitched together. Home to poets and artists for many years, Donegal's wild, rugged beauty has inspired generations. Recent work to compile the County Donegal Species Audits (Fitzgerald Ecology, 2024; 2025) confirms that these landscapes support many thousands of species across plants, fungi and animals, underlining Donegal's national importance for biodiversity and providing the core evidence base for this Biodiversity Action Plan. There are many designated sites in Donegal, designed to protect the most important examples of a wide range of habitats and species. However, Donegal is home to much more; the hedgerows and woodland pockets between protected sites, the streams and burns flowing to our rivers and the wetlands dotted across the landscape, all parts of the biodiversity jigsaw. It is also important to recognise the importance of the biodiversity in bordering counties with Donegal, including those in Northern Ireland, as biodiversity does not recognise borders, especially our rivers and watercourses which are determined by landscape. Chapter 2 explores both the protected sites, and the wide range of habitats and species found in County Donegal.

2.1 Designated Sites in County Donegal

2.1.1 International and European protected sites

Ramsar Sites

Ramsar Sites are sites named after the Convention on Wetlands more popularly known as the Ramsar Convention. It is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are 45 Ramsar sites in Ireland, covering 66,994 hectares, and four of these sites are in County Donegal; Dunragh Loughs/Pettigo Plateau, Trawbreaga Bay, Lough Barra Bog and Meenachullion.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are defined and regulated by the European Union Habitats Directive 1992 (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and the European Union (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 (S.I. 94/97). Member states are obliged to designate Special Areas of Conservation to protect and conserve habitats and species of importance in a European Union context.

There are currently 47 SACs designated across County Donegal, a full list of which can be found in Appendix 1. These protect habitats such as blanket bogs, raised bogs,

turloughs, sand dunes, machair, heaths, lakes and rivers, estuaries and sea inlets. They are also designated to protect species such as salmon, otter, freshwater pearl mussel, bottlenose dolphin and Killarney fern.

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated for the protection of birds, especially listed rare and vulnerable species and regularly occurring migratory species. They are defined and regulated by the European Union Birds Directive 1979 (Council Directive 79/409/EEC) and the European Union (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 (S.I.94/97) concerning the long-term protection and management of all wild bird species and their habitats in the EU. There are 26 SPAs in Donegal that focus on protecting birds, especially breeding seabird colonies and wintering goose sites. A full list can be found in Appendix 1.

Together, SACs and SPAs are referred to as Natura 2000 sites. The Natura 2000 network covers large parts of Donegal and has been established to conserve a wide variety of habitats and species including the freshwater pearl mussel (e.g. Leannan River, Lough Eske and Ardnamona Wood, and Fawnboy Bog/Lough Nacung SACs), blanket bog (e.g. Cloghernagore Bog and Glenveagh National Park and Lough Nillian SACs), Atlantic salmon, (e.g. River Finn SAC), otter (e.g. Lough Swilly SAC), embryonic shifting dunes (Gweedore Bays and Islands SAC), corncrake (Falcarragh to Meenlaragh SPA), curlew (e.g. Lough Swilly SPA).

2.1.2 Nationally Designated Sites

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs)

Natural Heritage Areas were established under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 and represent the basic designation for wildlife protection. They were derived from Areas of Scientific Interest (ASI) and include some of the best remaining areas of Ireland's natural and semi-natural habitats. Sites may have been selected on the basis of having special scientific significance for one or more species, communities, habitats, landforms, geological or geomorphological features, or a diversity of natural attributes. There are currently 12 NHA's in Donegal, a full list of which can be found in Appendix 1

Proposed NHAs (pNHAs)

Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) are sites of significant ecological interest in Ireland that have been identified as important for the conservation of biodiversity but have not yet received full statutory protection under Irish law. The concept of pNHAs emerged following the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000, which provided the legal framework for the designation of Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs). While NHAs are formally designated and protected, pNHAs represent a list of candidate sites that are

recognised for their high ecological value but remain at a preliminary stage in the designation process.

Nature Reserves

A Nature Reserve is a protected area of importance to wildlife. Ireland has 77 registered nature reserves that all play an integral role in preserving nature for future generations. Most are owned by the State, but some are owned by organisations or private landowners. There are ten nature reserves in County Donegal, namely Ardnamona Nature Reserve, Ballyarr Wood Nature Reserve, Derkmore Wood Nature Reserve, Duntally Wood Nature Reserve, Inch Levels Wildfowl Reserve, Lough Barra Bog Nature Reserve, Meenachullion Nature Reserve, Pettigo Plateau Nature Reserve, Rathmullen Wood Nature Reserve and Sheskinmore Nature Reserve. More information on these can be found at <https://www.npws.ie/nature-reserves/Donegal>.

National Parks

Ireland's National Parks have key goals:

- To protect and conserve nature for future generations,
- To be leaders in conservation education in Ireland, and
- To instil a sense of pride and respect for nature in all who visit the parks.

One of seven National Parks in Ireland, Glenveagh National Park sits in the heart of the Derryveagh Mountains in the north-west of Co. Donegal. This park is a remote and hauntingly beautiful wilderness of rugged mountains and pristine lakes. The park includes the former Glenveagh Estate, as well as the quartzite hills around Crocknafarragh to the west and the peatlands of Lough Barra bog, Meenachullion and Crockastoller to the south. More information on Glenveagh National Park can be found at www.nationalparks.ie/glenveagh/.

Wildfowl Sanctuaries

Wildfowl Sanctuaries are areas that have been excluded from the 'Open Season Order' so that game birds can rest and feed undisturbed. There are 68 sanctuaries in Ireland, five of which are in County Donegal at Ards, Blanket Nook, Dunfanaghy Lake, Lough Fern and Trawbreaga Bay. Shooting of game birds is not allowed in these sanctuaries. More information can be found at <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/wildfowl-sanctuaries>.

2.2 Key Habitats in Donegal

2.2.1 Beaches, dunes, machair and the Islands.

Beach biodiversity in Ireland includes a wide range of marine plants and animals that inhabit or wash up along the shoreline, acting as indicators of ocean health and climate change. Citizen science projects like Explore Your Shore³ and the National Biodiversity Data Centre's Big Beach Biodiversity Survey⁴ engage volunteers to record shells, seaweeds, crustaceans, and other intertidal species, building data to monitor long-term changes. Donegal's beaches are particularly rich, hosting rare seabirds such as little tern, wildflowers like oyster plant, along with marine species like basking sharks and grey seals, making it a priority area for coastal conservation.

Sand dunes are vital habitats that support rare and specialized wildlife and plants, often making them internationally significant as Special Areas of Conservation. Their diverse shapes create ideal conditions for species such as flowering plants, lizards and ground-nesting birds. In Ireland, several dune habitats are listed under Annex I of the Habitats Directive, including embryonic shifting dunes, white dunes, grey dunes, humid dune slacks, and machairs. Conservation efforts emphasise protecting these ecosystems from threats and promoting awareness through initiatives like the "Protect Our Dunes"⁵ campaign.

Machair is a rare type of coastal grassland found mainly in northwest Ireland. It forms on plains of wind-blown sand that contain a high number of crushed seashells, making the soil lime-rich. Machair landscapes are a mix of dry and wet areas, sitting behind beaches and dunes on the seaward side and beside wetlands, peatlands and heathlands on the landward side. This mix of habitats supports a wide range of wildlife, especially breeding waders like lapwing and dunlin and a wide range of pollinators. Red list species that have been recorded on Donegal machair sites include large red-tailed bumblebee, moss carder-bee and butterflies such as dark green fritillary, small heath, marsh fritillary and small blue.

Machair has developed over thousands of years in close connection with traditional farming. The Life on Machair⁶ project, explained further in Chapter 5, is currently supporting machair landowners in the North of Donegal at Lurgabrack and in western Donegal at Machaire Gathlán and surrounding areas.

³ <https://exploreyourshore.ie/>

⁴ <https://exploreyourshore.ie/surveys/the-big-beach-biodiversity-survey/>

⁵ <https://dunes.ie/protect-our-dunes-campaign/>

⁶ <https://www.lifeonmachair.ie/>

Donegal's islands offer peace and quiet, with fewer buildings and less noise. This makes them perfect for wildlife. Seabirds nest safely here, and barnacle geese graze on low-growing, salt-tolerant plants like thrift and bog pimpinell.

Toraigh is especially important, with sea cliffs, bird colonies, and open ground for waders and terns. Inis Bó Finne and Inis Meáin are strongholds for the corncrake, and Árainn Mhóir is home to Hart's saxifrage, a rare wildflower found only in Ireland. But unsustainable development and introduced invasive alien species like mink and rats can threaten these fragile island habitats.



Illustration © Robert Vaughan

2.2.2 Wetlands, loughs and rivers.

Wetlands are a widespread and important feature in Donegal. The reedbeds, muddy banks, their associated flood plains and wet meadows, provide a host of invaluable transition zone opportunities for wildlife, including plants, insects and wildfowl.

Wetlands, like fens and flushes grow where peat meets less acidic water. These areas support unique plants and wildlife. Reedbeds and wet alder woods (called fen carr) grow around lakes and rivers. These habitats are small and easily overlooked, but they're important. Wetlands are perhaps the most under threat, due to their sensitivities to drainage, water pollution and infilling.

Estuaries are where rivers meet the sea. Here, sand gives way to mud and silt, creating rich feeding grounds for countless shellfish, crabs, and worms. These attract thousands of birds and waders like dunlin and redshank, and wildfowl such as shelduck, teal, and shoveler. In winter, huge flocks arrive or stop over on their migration south. Around the

edges, flat lands provide food for swans and geese. Lough Swilly is home to about 30,000 wintering waterbirds, including the whooper swan and Greenland white-fronted goose, two of Ireland's most important species.

Lakes or loughs can be diverse, and Donegal has many types, as categorised by A Guide to Habitats in Ireland (Fossitt 2000)⁷:

- Dystrophic lakes which are small, acidic bog pools,
- Acid oligotrophic lakes which are rocky upland lakes with rare plants like water lobelia and fish like arctic char,
- Eutrophic lakes which are naturally nutrient-rich lowland lakes with lots of vegetation,
- Mesotrophic lakes which are moderately nutrient-rich, common in lowlands,
- Limestone and marl lakes, which are found mainly in south Donegal, with rare plants like charophytes, and
- Turloughs, rare seasonal lakes that appear and disappear and can be found near Ballyshannon.

These loughs support a wide range of wildlife, including dragonflies, wildfowl, and rare birds like the red-throated diver.



Illustration © Robert Vaughan

⁷ J.A. Fossitt, *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland*, The Heritage Council, Kilkenny, 2000

Rivers and streams provide vital resources for all wildlife. The smallest stream will have huge importance for localised biodiversity and a cumulative importance for the catchment area, as each tributary feeds larger rivers downstream. County Donegal's rivers are important for many species, including the European protected otter, freshwater pearl mussel, Atlantic salmon, native brown trout and white-clawed crayfish. The River Finn flows east into the Foyle, which marks the county's eastern edge. Wildlife, like cormorants, otters, and kingfishers live here, and the floodplains attract geese and swans in winter. The River Finn and River Deele support special plants like bird cherry and globe flower. Most other rivers are fast-flowing and rocky, but still home to dippers, brown trout, and in larger rivers, salmon. The main salmonid rivers are the Eske, Eany, Glen, an tUí Eanua, Abhainn Ghaoth Beara, Clady, Lackagh, Leannan, Cran and the Foyle/Finn.

2.2.3 Grasslands and farmland.

Grasslands are one of the most common habitats in Ireland. They range from intensively managed fields used for farming to natural areas rich in wildflowers and wildlife. The most common type is improved grassland, which is fertilised and reseeded for agriculture. In contrast, semi-natural grasslands, such as dry limestone grasslands, neutral meadows, and wet grasslands, are much more diverse and support a wide variety of plants, insects, and birds.

These natural grasslands are important for biodiversity, but many have been lost or changed through drainage, heavy grazing, and inappropriate fertiliser use. Protecting the remaining species-rich grasslands is vital for wildlife and for maintaining Ireland's natural heritage.

Farmland in Donegal has changed significantly over the past 50 years. Traditional mixed farming systems have largely disappeared, replaced by more intensive grassland and silage production. This shift has reduced habitat diversity and led to major declines in farmland wildlife. Birds such as yellowhammer, twite, grey partridge, lapwing, curlew, snipe, and corncrake are now rare or red-listed, while the corn bunting is extinct in Ireland. Other species like barn owl, kestrel, whinchat, and meadow pipit have also declined sharply.

Wildflowers once common in arable fields, such as field gentian, marsh lousewort, and devil's-bit scabious, have suffered severe losses due to reseeded, heavy fertiliser use, herbicides, and drainage. Over half of Ireland's native plant species have declined since the 1950s, with grassland plants among the worst affected.



Illustration © Robert Vaughan

Today, Donegal's landscape is dominated by improved grassland and some arable land in the east, while upland areas remain under rough grazing. Intensively managed fields generally support fewer species, but hedgerows, field margins, and upland peatlands are still vital for biodiversity. Large open fields near Lough Swilly attract wintering waterfowl and Irish hares, while uplands provide habitats for species like golden plover and red grouse, though these are also in decline.

To help reverse these trends, Ireland introduced the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) under the CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027). ACRES pays farmers to adopt measures such as planting native hedgerows, creating species-rich grasslands, and restoring peatlands and wetlands.

2.2.4 Woodlands and Hedgerows

Woodland is the climax vegetation in Ireland, meaning that if most habitats were left to progress with no interference from humans, some form of woodland would develop. However, as humans have settled over the years, many of our woodlands have been cleared for harvesting and to create farmland. Today, Ireland is one of the least wooded areas in Europe, with only Ireland's total forest cover around 12%, but as low as 1.5% is native tree cover.

Native broadleaf woodlands are rare and often small, but they support more biodiversity than any other habitat. They're home to hundreds of hidden species, including moths and woodland birds. There are different types, from oak to ash and wet woodland too.

Coillte Dúchasacha Chontae Dhún na nGall / Native Woodlands of County Donegal, by Seán Ó Gaoithín, paints an up-to-date and wide narrative of woodland in Donegal, covering both the history of woodlands in Ireland and 28 'woodstories', depicting the tree species and other biodiversity found in 28 woodlands across Donegal.

Oak woodlands are mainly dominated by oak trees, but they also contain a diverse mix of other native tree species, such as downy birch, hazel, holly and rowan. Their understorey and ground flora are normally quite diverse, with common plants including bluebells, wood anemone, bramble, ferns, lichens, mosses, liverworts, and not forgetting the important fungi.

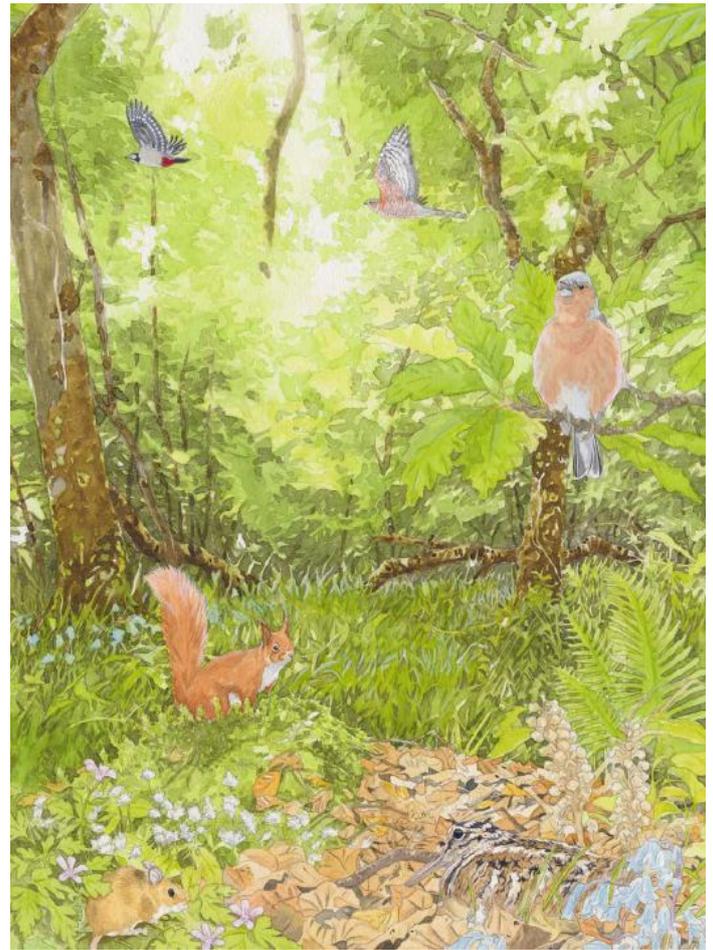


Illustration © Robert Vaughan

Parklands are important types of woodland characterised by veteran or mature trees, both native and non-native, as well as deciduous and coniferous, which are surrounded by grassland pasture. They are normally associated with grand old houses or demesnes such as Oakfield Park, Raphoe, Glenveagh National Park and Castle and Drumhalla House, Rathmullan. Parklands support a wide variety of species, including rare lichen species, many beetles, bugs, insects, and numerous birds, such as song thrush and bullfinch.

Hedgerows are defined as linear boundaries composed of planted shrubs, which are vital wildlife corridors within our fragmented landscape. A species-rich hedgerow should contain six or more woody species on average, within a 30-metre length. Hedgerows resemble woodlands in their basic structure of trees with an understorey. They are very important for the movement of birds and animals from one pocket of woodland to another, providing much needed refuge throughout the countryside.



Illustration © Robert Vaughan

With few woodlands in Donegal, hedgerows are vital for wildlife. A well-managed hedge supports wildflowers, insects, small mammals, and birds such as yellowhammer and redwing.

2.2.5 Bogs and Heath

Bogs and heath are defining features of Donegal, including lowland raised bogs, blanket bogs, fens, upland heathland, and montane heath. Historically used for plantations, grazing, and peat cutting, these areas are now recognised for their biodiversity, carbon storage, flood control, and cultural heritage, preserving archaeological finds like treasure hoards, bog bodies, and ancient trackways.

Lowland raised bogs are dome-shaped peatlands forming in low-lying basins below 150m, fed primarily by rainwater and supporting sphagnum dominated vegetation. There are fewer in Donegal, being in Ireland's northwest with its predominantly upland terrain and oceanic climate, but small remnants or transitional sites exist, often protected as NHAs or SACs such as Magheraboy Bog and Tamur Bog SAC. Species typically found on raised bogs include hare's tail cottongrass, sundews, bog asphodel, curlew, large heath butterfly and of course many Sphagnum moss species.

Blanket bogs are found on higher ground as a layer of peat and vegetation covering the hillsides like a blanket. In Donegal, blanket bog can be found in many places including the Pettigo Plateau, Barnesmore Bog, Corveen Bog and in many spots in Glenveagh National Park. Blanket bog often occurs as a mosaic with other habitats, such as

heathland, and on lower slopes with purple moorgrass, rush pasture and fens. Important plant and animal species found on blanket bogs include Sphagnum mosses, sundew, hare's tail cotton grass, tall bog-sedge, green hairstreak butterfly, golden plover, skylark and Irish hare.

Upland heath is widespread in Donegal's hilly and mountainous areas, typically on acidic soils above 200–300m, transitioning from lowland blanket bog to exposed summits. It features dwarf shrubs like heather, bilberry, and cross-leaved heath. Glenveagh National Park and Sléibhte Dhoire Bheatha, Cró Nimhe, Horn Head, Barnesmore Gap and Sliabh Liag are among many places you can see upland heath.

Montane heath is a specialised upland habitat found in mountainous regions at high elevations, where harsh conditions like strong winds, low temperatures, and exposure prevent the growth of taller shrubs or trees. It features low-growing dwarf shrubs such as heather, bilberry, crowberry, and sometimes lichens or mosses, often on acidic, nutrient-poor soils. Donegal examples include the Derryveagh Mountains, Muckish and the Bluestack Mountains.

2.2.6 Urban habitats and gardens

Urban habitats play a key role in supporting diverse wildlife and introducing people to biodiversity. Many first encounter species like ladybirds, hedgehogs, blue tits, song thrushes, and bats in gardens, parks, or golf courses.

School grounds can serve as both biodiversity hotspots and educational resources. Outdoor classrooms allow children to engage with nature, while simple wildlife projects include planting native trees, creating butterfly gardens, building insect hotels, bird boxes, and surveying existing wildlife.

Public parks and open spaces help biodiversity thrive in towns and villages. Different management of larger spaces can create diverse habitats like mini-woodlands, meadows, and ponds. Urban areas are crucial for biodiversity, offering places where people and wildlife can share and enjoy nature. Visit Swan Park in Buncrana, Ballymacool Park in Letterkenny or Mall Park in Ballyshannon to discover what biodiversity gems you can find!

Gardens in Ireland act as important refuges for wildlife by offering food and shelter to birds, pollinators, and small mammals. Using native plants, leaving untidy corners, planting wildflowers, and allowing hedgerows to grow help boost biodiversity. Features like ponds, log piles, and bird boxes support nesting and hibernation, and avoiding chemicals protects insects and amphibians. The Gardening for Wildlife booklet, an excellent guide produced by Local Authority Heritage Officers across Ireland, with help

from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Heritage Council, shows that even small steps, like letting dandelions or ivy grow, can greatly benefit local wildlife.

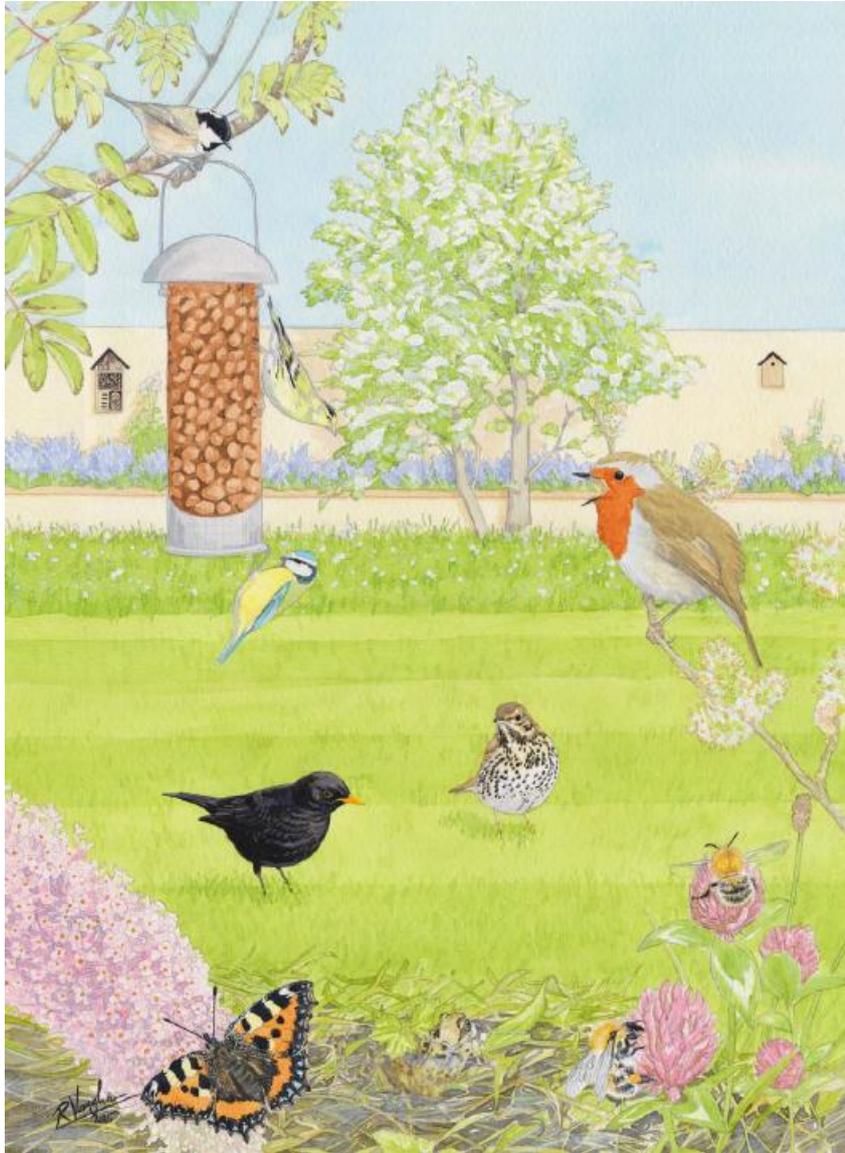


Illustration © Robert Vaughan

Chapter 3: The Biodiversity Crisis

3.1 State of Nature in Ireland

Ireland's biodiversity is in crisis. Ireland's own assessments under the EU Habitats Directive show that

- Around 85 % of EU-protected habitats in Ireland are in unfavourable condition,
- Almost half are still declining,
- Over half of native Irish plant species have declined, and
- 30% of our wild bee species are threatened with extinction.

Bird populations are also under severe pressure. 26% of regularly occurring bird species are now on the Red List, including iconic species like curlew, corncrake and hen harrier.



Illustration © Robert Vaughan

The causes of biodiversity loss are complex and widespread. Key pressures include habitat destruction, pollution, climate change, invasive species, and unsustainable land use practices. Agricultural intensification, urban development, and water pollution continue to degrade Ireland's natural ecosystems, leaving many habitats fragmented and species vulnerable.

Ireland ranks among the lowest in Europe for habitat quality and protected area coverage. According to the Biodiversity Intactness Index, Ireland is in the bottom 10% globally for biodiversity health. Despite this, there is growing public awareness and political recognition of the crisis. The declaration of a national biodiversity emergency, the launch of the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan, and increased funding for nature conservation signal a turning point. But urgent, coordinated action is needed to reverse these trends and restore Ireland's natural heritage.

In County Donegal, these national trends are echoed in the new County Donegal Species Audits (Fitzgerald Ecology, 2024; 2025). The flora and fungi volume brings together records of over 4,000 taxa across plants, algae, lichens, bryophytes and fungi, while the fauna volume collates equivalent information for animal groups. Together they show that Donegal is both a stronghold for many threatened species and a county

where large gaps remain in our knowledge, especially for invertebrates, lower plants and marine and upland habitats. The County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan responds directly to that by using the species audits as a baseline and by targeting the data gaps and survey priorities they identify.

3.2 What are the problems facing biodiversity?

Over centuries in Ireland, from the first clearance of native woodland, through drainage of bogs, intensification of farming and rapid coastal and urban development, people have reshaped almost every part of the landscape. Very few areas are now truly “natural”. Most habitats are semi-natural and heavily influenced by how we farm, build, drain, plant and manage land and sea.

The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023–2030 recognises that halting this loss now requires a “whole of government, whole of society” response. Set in this Irish context, and for County Donegal in particular, the main problems can be described as follows:

3.2.1 Habitat fragmentation

Across Ireland, habitats have been broken into smaller and more isolated pieces. In Donegal this can be seen where meadows, wetlands and bogs have been drained or converted, leaving only scattered fragments of species-rich grassland or raised and blanket bog behind. Development in the open countryside and historic forestry planting can carve up peatlands, heath, coastal fringes and river corridors. When habitats are cut up in this way, wildlife finds it harder to:

- Move to find food, mates or nesting/roosting sites.
- Shift its range in response to climate change.
- Maintain healthy genetic diversity between populations.

Fragmentation also makes edge effects and disturbance worse as more noise, light, traffic, dogs and people are along the margins of what were once quiet sites. In the Irish countryside, hedgerows, tree-lined townland boundaries, rivers, streams and traditional stone walls become critical “wildlife corridors” that help connect these broken patches. The NBAP and the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan both highlight the importance of these linear features in allowing species to move through farmed landscapes.

3.2.2 Habitat degradation

- Even where habitats remain on the map, their quality is often declining. In Ireland the main pressures include:
- Nutrient pollution from agriculture and wastewater, which is now the single biggest issue affecting our rivers and lakes,

- Drainage, channelisation and dredging of streams and drains, which straightens and deepens channels, strips out natural banks and pools, and damages freshwater and wetland habitats,
- Extensive peat cutting and historic drainage of bogs, which dry out peatlands, release stored carbon and fundamentally alter bog and wet heath habitats,
- Overgrazing or under-grazing, which can either remove vegetation and expose bare soil, or allow scrub and bracken to overwhelm formerly species-rich grasslands and heaths,
- Air pollution and climate change, affecting sensitive mosses, lichens and upland vegetation, and
- Marine degradation, including damage to seagrass, kelp and inshore reefs from pollution, climate change and some unsustainable fishing practices.
- As habitats degrade, specialist species disappear and are replaced by a smaller number of generalist, disturbance-tolerant plants and animals.

3.2.3 Loss of habitats

Habitat loss continues to be one of the most serious threats to biodiversity across Ireland. This includes the loss of:

- Semi-natural grasslands, converted to intensively managed pasture or reseeded monocultures,
- Wetlands, infilled or drained for development, roads, agriculture, forestry or peat extraction,
- Native woodlands and scrub, removed for commercial forestry, development or intensive agriculture, and
- Coastal habitats such as dunes, machair and saltmarsh, which are affected by coastal development on one side and rising sea levels on the other.

Although many of these losses happen in small parcels, the cumulative effect is large. Where bogs, coastal systems and traditional townland patterns are central to landscape character, the loss of even small wetlands, field margins or scrub patches can significantly erode the wider ecological network.

3.2.4 Decline and loss of species

Ireland has already lost some species entirely, and many more are now at risk. Corn bunting is no longer a breeding species in Ireland and corncrake and curlew, once familiar farmland and wetlands birds, are now on the Red List (highest conservation concern) in the “Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020–2026” and are considered at risk of extinction as Irish breeding species.

Pollinators, including many wild bees and hoverflies, continue to decline, prompting the development of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan as a coordinated response.

Birds are often highlighted because we have long-term data for them, but similar or worse patterns may exist for plants, insects, fish, fungi and other groups. For many taxonomic groups there are still gaps in survey data, so the full scale of decline in counties like Donegal is not yet fully understood.

3.2.5 Reduced ability to adapt to climate change

Climate change is already affecting Ireland's biodiversity through rising sea levels and more frequent storm events, impacting coasts, dunes, machair and saltmarsh.

Changing rainfall patterns, more intense downpours and longer dry spells are affecting rivers, wetlands, peatlands and drinking-water supplies. Shifts in seasonal timing such as earlier springs, can disrupt the synchrony between flowering plants and pollinators, or between insect emergence and bird breeding. Species will only be able to cope with these changes if they have access to bigger, better and more joined up habitats.

Chapter 4: Policy Framework for Developing the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan

4.1 Developing the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan

The County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan will be a guiding document for Donegal County Council over the next five years, focused on protecting and restoring biodiversity. Its main goal is to halt biodiversity loss by supporting collaboration between the Council, local communities, and nature-focused organisations to address growing environmental and climate challenges.

This plan recognises that biodiversity is essential to our health, economy, and quality of life. It outlines practical actions to conserve and enhance natural habitats, protect species, and build resilience in the face of climate change.

Importantly, the plan encourages everyone, not just conservation experts, to get involved. Whether you're a local authority decision-maker, planner, architect, engineer, politician, developer, business owner, farmer, school, faith group, Tidy Town group or a garden owner, you have a role to play in protecting and restoring nature.

The County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan was developed in collaboration with The Heritage Council, the Donegal Biodiversity Working Group, the County Donegal Heritage Forum, a wide range of stakeholders and with extensive public consultation.

4.1.1 The Heritage Council

The Heritage Council is a statutory body established under the Heritage Act 1995. Their mission is to engage, educate and advocate to develop a wider understanding of the vital contribution that heritage makes to social, environmental and economic well-being. The Heritage Council was instrumental in establishing a Biodiversity Officer Network, with biodiversity officers employed by local authorities in partnership with the Heritage Council under the auspices of the biodiversity officer programme, which was initiated in 2023. The Heritage Council supports the work of the biodiversity officer by providing professional training, provision of network supports and funding.

The Heritage Council published Guidelines for Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs)⁸ as a resource for Local Authorities in the development and implementation of their biodiversity strategies. These guidelines provide a robust framework for creating comprehensive, effective, and sustainable action plans that integrate biodiversity considerations across all local authority functions. The County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan has been developed in line with these guidelines.

⁸[Local-Authority-Biodiversity-Action-Plan-Guidelines.pdf](#)

4.1.2 County Donegal Biodiversity Office

The County Donegal Biodiversity Office was established in November 2024 with the appointment of County Donegal's first biodiversity officer. The Biodiversity Office is part of the Culture Division of Donegal County Council that includes the County Heritage Office, County Archives, County Library, County Museum, County Arts Office and the Regional Cultural Centre. The biodiversity officer post is a joint initiative between Donegal County Council and The Heritage Council under the biodiversity officer programme.



Photo 1. County Donegal Biodiversity Working Group

4.1.3 County Donegal Biodiversity Working Group

The Biodiversity Working Group is a non-statutory advisory group established by the local authority to provide observations on the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan. The group is established as a working group of the County Donegal Heritage Forum, and members of the working group will report back to the County Donegal Heritage Forum on the actions of the Biodiversity Working Group, to ensure that the natural heritage objectives of the County Donegal Heritage Plan are implemented. The Donegal Biodiversity Working Group was set up in 2024 and were instrumental in helping the Biodiversity Officer at key stages throughout 2024 and 2025, during the drafting of the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan.

4.2 Legislative and Policy Context

The County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan was prepared in alignment with local, national and European policy and legislative frameworks. Outlined in this Chapter are some of the key legislation and policies that were reviewed and reflected in the drafting of the Donegal BAP. These International, European, National and local frameworks ensure that biodiversity is not treated in isolation, but is integrated into planning, climate action, heritage, and community development across the county. The success of this Donegal BAP will depend on collaboration between government, local authorities, communities, landowners, NGOs, and individuals.

4.2.1 Global Frameworks

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal set of goals, targets and indicators adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, designed to guide global efforts towards a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous future by 2030. Of the 17 SDGs, Goal 14 (Life Below Water) aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, while Goal 15 (Life on Land) focuses on protecting, restoring, and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, managing forests sustainably, combating desertification, and halting biodiversity loss. Other goals with significant relevance to biodiversity include Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The goals and objectives of this Donegal BAP are aligned with the UN SDG's.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), adopted in 1992, is a global treaty focused on conserving biodiversity, promoting its sustainable use, and ensuring fair sharing of benefits from genetic resources. It requires countries like Ireland to develop biodiversity plans, integrate biodiversity into policies, and establish protected areas. Recently, the CBD's Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) has set ambitious post-2020 targets, most notably the commitment to protect at least 30% of land and sea areas, restore ecosystems, reduce threats to biodiversity, and ensure all sectors support biodiversity goals.

UN Paris Agreement on Climate Change

The UN Paris Agreement on Climate Change was adopted by 196 Parties at COP21 in Paris during December 2015. The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty that aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C, preferably to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. It recognises the intrinsic relationship between climate change and biodiversity, highlighting the need for ecosystem-based solutions, nature-based approaches, and the protection of natural carbon sinks such as forests,

peatlands, and oceans. Addressing climate change is essential for halting biodiversity loss, and, conversely, conserving and restoring biodiversity is critical for climate mitigation and adaptation.

4.2.2 European Frameworks

EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, ‘Bringing Nature Back Into Our Lives’, is a flagship initiative forming an integral part of the European Green Deal. Its overarching goal is to halt and reverse the decline of biodiversity across Europe, ensuring that by 2030, nature is on a path to recovery for the benefit of people, the environment, and the climate. The strategy sets out ambitious and far-reaching objectives, such as the creation of protected areas covering at least 30% of Europe’s land and sea, and the restoration of degraded ecosystems

Nature Restoration Law

The Nature Restoration Law, adopted by the European Parliament on 27 February 2024, represents a major legislative step towards achieving the goals of the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. This law sets out legally binding restoration targets for Member States, requiring them to restore at least 20% of the EU’s land and sea areas by 2030, with the longer-term objective of restoring all ecosystems in need by 2050. The targets are comprehensive and apply across various ecosystems, including agricultural land, forests, wetlands, marine environments, and urban areas. The legislation also mandates regular monitoring and reporting and obliges Member States to prepare national restoration plans outlining how they will achieve these targets. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) are developing Ireland’s first National Nature Restoration Plan which is due for publication later in 2026.

EU Birds Directive

The Birds Directive was adopted in 1979. It is one of the first pieces of environmental legislation to be adopted by the EU. The Birds Directive aims to protect all naturally occurring wild bird species present in the EU and their most important habitats. In addition to halting the decline or disappearance of bird species, the Directive aims to allow bird species to recover and thrive over the long-term.⁹

EU Habitats Directive

The EU Habitats Directive 1992 is central to EU biodiversity policy, aiming to conserve and restore rare or threatened habitats and species. Like the Birds Directive, the

⁹ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/birds-directive_en

Habitats Directive requires all Member States to establish a strict protection regime for species listed in Annex IV, both inside and outside Natura 2000 sites¹⁰.

EU Water Framework Directive

The EU Water Framework Directive seeks to prevent any further deterioration of the current condition of water bodies, while also ensuring their protection, enhancement, and restoration with the goal of achieving good water quality status by 2027. Additionally, it mandates compliance with requirements for designated sites and incorporates the provisions of the Shellfish Directive.

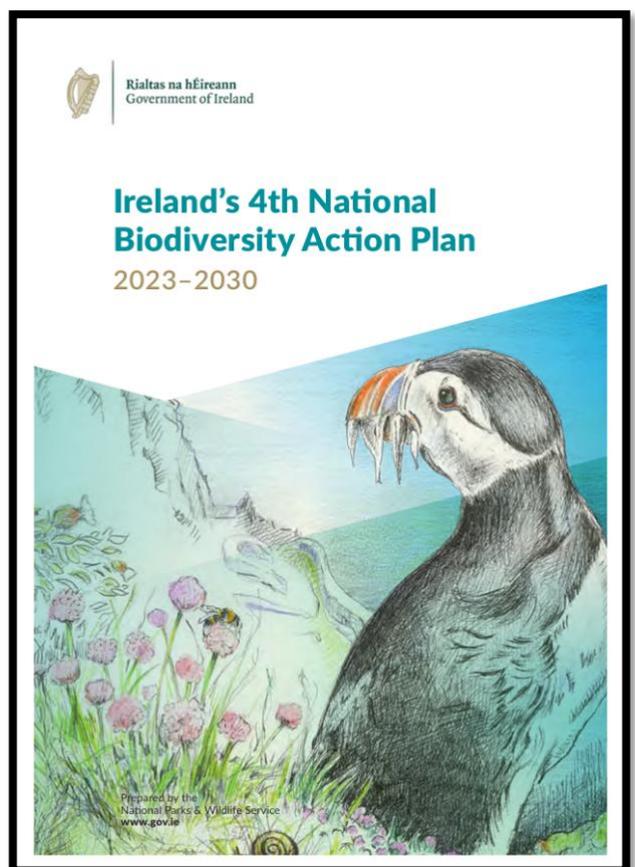
4.2.3 National Frameworks

Ireland’s 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan

Ireland’s 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) sets the national biodiversity agenda for the period 2023-2030 and aims to deliver the transformative changes required to the ways in which we value and protect nature. The 4th NBAP has been developed with the support, advice and input of the interdepartmental Biodiversity Working Group and the independent Biodiversity Forum. Ireland’s 2nd National Biodiversity Conference was held to gather insights and recommendations for the development of the NBAP and a public consultation process was held to provide further opportunities to engage with the Plan.

The 4th NBAP strives for a “whole of government, whole of society” approach to the governance and conservation of biodiversity. The aim is to ensure that every citizen, community, business, local authority, semi-state and state agency has an awareness of biodiversity and its importance, and of the implications of its loss, while also understanding how they can act to address the biodiversity emergency as part of a renewed national effort to “act for nature”.

This National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 builds upon the achievements of the previous Plan. It aims to continue to implement actions within the framework of five strategic objectives, while addressing new and emerging issues:



¹⁰ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/habitats-directive_en

- Objective 1 - Adopt a Whole of Government, Whole of Society Approach to Biodiversity
- Objective 2 - Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs
- Objective 3 - Secure Nature's Contribution to People
- Objective 4 - Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity
- Objective 5 - Strengthen Ireland's Contribution to International Biodiversity Initiatives

Under the NBAP, all local authorities are required to prepare a Biodiversity Action Plan by the end of 2026. Donegal County Council, with the support of the Heritage Council's Biodiversity Officer Programme, is taking action to meet this requirement and deliver its first Biodiversity Action Plan during 2026.

The Wildlife Acts

The Wildlife Act 1976 (as amended, including the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023), provide the main statutory framework for nature conservation in Ireland, including the protection of wild birds, wild animals and certain plants, the designation and management of Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), and the regulation of activities that may damage habitats or disturb protected species. The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023 (No. 25 of 2023) updates the 2000 Act, strengthens provisions on bog habitats and NHAs, and introduces a new public sector biodiversity duty. This duty places the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) on a statutory footing and requires listed public bodies (including Government departments, agencies, local authorities and planning bodies) to:

- have regard to the objectives and targets of the NBAP in exercising their functions,
- integrate biodiversity considerations into their plans, policies, programmes and day-to-day decision-making, and
- report regularly on the measures they have taken, and the progress made.

National Planning Framework 'Ireland 2040'

The National Planning Framework 'Ireland 2040' sets out Ireland's long-term strategy for sustainable spatial development and environmental protection. It promotes balanced economic growth and conservation, with a focus on biodiversity through measures like protecting designated sites and species. The framework values both green (parks, woodlands) and blue (rivers, lakes, coast) infrastructure for supporting wildlife, ecosystem services, and community wellbeing.

Climate Action Plan

Ireland's annual Climate Action Plan, backed by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, sets legally binding 5-year carbon budgets and

sectoral targets. It is implemented locally through Local Authority Climate Action Plans, which must address both emissions reduction and climate adaptation. A core theme is the use of nature-based solutions. Measures such as peatland rewetting, native woodland creation, river and wetland restoration, and coastal habitat protection can cut emissions, store carbon, reduce flood risk and improve water quality. Potentially, decarbonisation and adaptation can become major opportunities to restore and connect habitats, so that climate action and biodiversity enhancement reinforce each other instead of competing.

The Heritage Council's Strategic Plan 2023–2028

The Donegal BAP is also guided by the Heritage Council's Strategic Plan 2023–2028, Our Place in Time, which identifies climate change and biodiversity loss as one of its six core strategic priorities. The plan supports:

- Local Authority Biodiversity Officers to lead biodiversity action at county level,
- Community engagement and education to build awareness and stewardship,
- Nature-based solutions to address climate and biodiversity challenges,
- Partnerships across sectors to deliver shared outcomes, and
- Evidence-based action through research, monitoring, and data sharing.

Donegal's BAP reflects these priorities by embedding biodiversity into Council operations, supporting community-led action, and promoting collaboration across sectors.

All Ireland Pollinator Plan

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) is a framework bringing together different sectors across the island of Ireland to create a landscape where pollinators can survive and thrive. It is implemented by the National Biodiversity Data Centre and is overseen by a 15-member all-island steering group.

One third of our wild bee species is threatened with extinction. This is mainly because we have drastically reduced the amount of food and safe nesting sites that support them, also because of pesticides, pests and disease, and climate change.

To help tackle this issue, the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan was established in 2015. Working with local authorities, businesses, farmers, communities, schools, sports clubs, and gardeners, it provides a clear roadmap for managing our landscape to support pollinating insects.

4.2.4 Donegal County Council plans

Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2024 - 2029

The Donegal County Council Corporate Plan outlines its vision, mission, and core values, guiding the delivery of high-quality services to the community. The strategic framework is rooted in County Donegal's unique character and is built around five key strategic goals, delivering services, enabling growth, mainstreaming climate action, building organisational capacity and empowering and supporting communities.

One action clearly aligned with the aims of the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan is to 'prepare and implement the first County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan, including delivering initiatives to raise awareness, commissioning research, providing advice, supporting National Biodiversity Week and promoting best practice in relation to biodiversity'.

These elements are fully addressed and explored further in this Donegal BAP.

Donegal County Development Plan 2024–2030

Donegal County Development Plan 2024–2030 sets out policies to protect and enhance natural heritage and green/blue infrastructure, like rivers, bogs, estuaries, and beaches. It supports nature-based solutions for flood management, water quality, climate adaptation, and public health. The implementation of these through planning will be instrumental in helping to halt biodiversity loss further and work towards enhancing and restoring biodiversity in Donegal.

Biodiversity protection is primarily addressed through Objective BIO-O-1 and Objective BIO-O-2 and Policies BIO-P-1 to BIO-P-5 of Chapter 11 (Natural, Built & Archaeological Heritage) of the County Donegal Development Plan 2024–2030:

- Protect and enhance biodiversity (BIO-O-1),
- Have regard to the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan and National Peatlands Strategy,
- Safeguard European sites and Annex species (BIO-P-1),
- Protect other designated sites and Wildlife Act species (BIO-P-2),
- Retain and enhance local biodiversity features (BIO-P-3),
- Control introduction and spread of invasive alien species (BIO-P-4), and
- Support pollinators (BIO-P-5).

Donegal Integrated Framework Local Economic Community Plan 2023-2029

The Donegal LECP 2023–2029 is the statutory “umbrella” social, economic and community plan for the county. Its core purpose is to set a shared vision for Donegal’s future and to coordinate how the Council, agencies, communities and stakeholders work together to deliver better outcomes in areas such as the economy and employment, health and wellbeing, community development, culture and language, infrastructure and climate action. It sits alongside (and complements) the County Development Plan.

Within that wider framework, the LECP explicitly positions climate resilience, natural capital and environmental sustainability as cross-cutting priorities. Under High-Level Goal 1, Objective 1.3 commits to protecting, restoring and sustainably developing Donegal’s environment, and includes a specific action to prepare and implement a County Biodiversity Action Plan (Action 1.3.2). The Donegal BAP will directly support delivery of this action and give practical effect to the LECP’s commitments on nature, climate resilience and the green economy.

County Donegal Heritage Plan 2023–2030

The County Donegal Heritage Plan’s aim is to work together to manage, conserve, promote and celebrate our heritage responsibly, foster appreciation and communicate the values of our rich heritage to present and future generations. Donegal County Council will achieve this ambition by improving resources for heritage services, engaging and supporting communities in the management of our heritage, raising awareness and appreciation of our heritage, providing advice, promoting best practice and commissioning new research. The Heritage Plan can be found online at www.donegalculture.ie/en/services/heritage/plans.

Donegal County Council Climate Action Plan 2024–2029

Donegal County Council published its inaugural Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029 early in 2024. The Climate Action Plan sets out how Donegal County Council’s goals, objectives and actions to improve energy efficiency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and mainstream climate action across the organisation. It also addresses how the Council will adopt a broader leadership role in the county by supporting local communities, businesses and other stakeholders to take climate action. The Plan’s vision is that Donegal will be climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and carbon neutral by the end of 2050. The Donegal BAP has taken account of the actions within the LACAP and the feedback received during the LACAP consultation to develop a practical, realistic and complementary Donegal BAP, particularly in relation to one of its key themes - Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure.

Chapter 5: Biodiversity Case Studies in County Donegal

County Donegal has a proud history of action for biodiversity. Across the county, countless individuals, community groups, and organisations have been working tirelessly to protect and restore our natural heritage. From local conservation projects to habitat restoration and species monitoring, there is already an incredible network of people committed to safeguarding County Donegal's rich biodiversity. Their efforts provide a strong foundation for future initiatives and demonstrate the power of collaboration in caring for our environment. Some examples of projects and initiatives are showcased below.

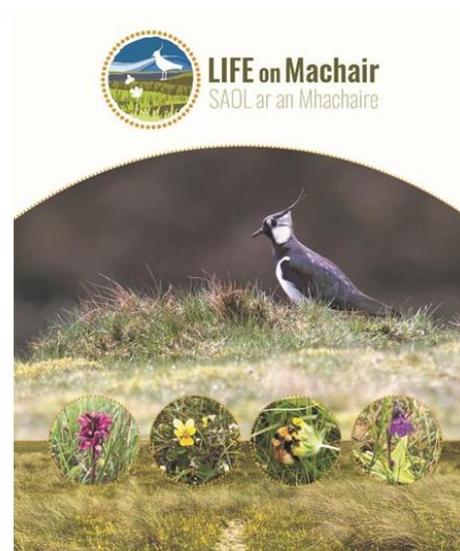
5.1 Corncrake LIFE Project

The Corncrake LIFE Project, launched in March 2022 with €5.9 million in EU funding, aims to restore corncrake populations mainly in County Donegal and parts of Connacht. The project collaborates with farmers and landowners at sites like Malin Head and Inis Bó Finne to manage habitats, delay mowing, and use wildlife-friendly methods. So far, nearly 1,500 hectares have been managed with 250 farmers, traditional grazing restored, and innovative techniques like thermal drones and acoustic monitoring used. These actions have increased corncrake territories by 45% since 2018. The corncrake remains culturally significant in County Donegal. Learn more at www.corncrakelife.ie.

5.2 LIFE on Machair

LIFE on Machair is a six-year EU funded project running from 2022 to 2028. The project was developed to work with farmers, landowners and local communities in a bid to protect and restore Ireland's network of Machair systems and associated breeding wader and pollinator communities.

There are nine target areas in the project, including Gaoth Dobhair and Horn Head in County Donegal. These target areas represent a sample of Machair sites in Ireland which are important sites for breeding waders and pollinators. More information and up-to-date projects can be found at www.lifeonmachair.ie/.



Protecting and restoring Ireland's network of machair systems and associated breeding wader and pollinator communities

The LIFE on Machair project is being coordinated by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) through collaboration with project partners the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Teagasc and Fáilte Ireland.

5.3 Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE

The Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE Integrated Project is a nine-year EU-funded initiative running from 2021 to 2029, with a budget of €20.6 million. Its goal is to improve the conservation status of blanket bogs and associated habitats within Ireland’s Natura 2000 network, focusing on 35 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) across the northwest, including key sites in County Donegal such as Gleann Cholm Cille, Sliabh Liag and the Doire Bheatha Mountains. The project works closely with farmers and communities, introducing a pioneering Results-Based Payment Scheme that rewards landowners based on habitat quality rather than prescribed actions, incentivising sustainable management. Achievements to date include training over 150 farmers and advisors, enrolling hundreds of farmers in RBPS, and implementing restoration measures such as invasive species control, water management, and fire prevention. Community engagement has been central, with local support groups, school education programs, and awareness campaigns launched to foster stewardship. More information can be found at www.wildatlanticnature.ie/.

5.4 Breeding Waders EIP

The Breeding Waders EIP project aims to secure existing Breeding Wader populations and support population recovery through landscape management and policy development. This EIP-Agri project is a €25 million nationwide project, co-funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. More information can be found at www.breedingwaders.ie.



Illustration © Robert Vaughan

5.5 LAWPRO Programmes

Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) works on behalf of Ireland’s 31 local authorities to protect and restore good water quality in our rivers, lakes, estuaries, ground and coastal water through catchment science and local community engagement.

LAWPRO currently offer three main funding streams to support water quality and biodiversity projects, all aimed at improving water quality and fostering community engagement.

1. The Community Water Development Fund, which provides grants for community-led initiatives like river restoration, invasive species removal, and nature-based solutions,

2. The Catchment Support Fund, which helps NGOs and community groups with core costs and capacity building to deliver Ireland's Water Action Plan, and
3. A Small Grants & Events Scheme, offering funds for local awareness events and small-scale actions such as citizen science, workshops, and clean-up.

More information can be found at www.lawaters.ie.

5.6 Donegal County Council Projects

Donegal County Council have been acting for biodiversity for many years through various departments, but strategically by the County Donegal Heritage Office through the delivery of the past and current iterations of the County Donegal Heritage Plans. Now, the County Donegal Biodiversity Office complements this role, looking more deeply at the Council's actions for biodiversity and adding additional resource to deliver on the ground. We have included a few examples of projects that have happened or are ongoing in the county, funded or coordinated by Donegal County Council.

5.6.1 County Donegal Wetland Survey

With part-funding from NPWS Local Biodiversity Action Fund, over the last three years (2023-2025), 65 wetland sites across County Donegal have been surveyed as part of a series of wetland surveys with the aim to build a picture of the wetland resource in County Donegal that is not protected under legislation. Numerous sites of high conservation importance have been identified including four sites of national importance, 45 of county importance and 13 of high local importance, including habitats such as transition mires, lakes, reed swamps, active blanket bog, dystrophic lakes, wet heath and Molinia meadows

These sites were selected annually from the 2021 and 2022 County Donegal Wetland Survey project (Foss et al. 2021 and Crushell et al 2022), where the initial desktop survey identified 898 sites in County Donegal for which little or no ecological information was available. The results of these field surveys suggests that many important wetland sites may remain un-identified throughout County Donegal and further surveys will be required to improve our knowledge of the county's wetland heritage.

5.6.2 Supporting Donegal's Breeding Waders

Donegal County Council through NPWS Local Biodiversity Action Fund, have provided funding from 2022 – 2025, to allow the continued maintenance and monitoring of predator fences at key breeding wader sites in County Donegal. The main aim for 2025 was to maintain four of the five predator fences, with Sheskinmore being managed by NPWS. Fieldwork was undertaken to ensure that the fences were operating effectively during the breeding season and to monitor the populations to determine ongoing

trends. It was determined that continued monitoring at all operational fence sites should be a priority, to ensure effective operation and to monitor breeding wader trends at these sites. It was found that sites with predator fences are amongst only a small number of sites in Ireland where breeding wader populations are increasing against a backdrop of continued declines.

5.6.3 Citizen Science and Awareness Raising

The Putting Donegal Biodiversity on the Map project is a programme of citizen science activities, wildlife surveys, practical action demonstrations and biodiversity education activities to help put more Donegal biological records and practical action to support biodiversity, on the map. Donegal County Council have coordinated and promoted a variety of events, walks and talks for a range of people to learn about and experience local biodiversity and a concentration of the activities happen during National Biodiversity Week in May and National heritage Week in August. In 2024 and 2025 there were 67 events funded, coordinated or participated in by the Donegal County Council Biodiversity Office, reaching approx. 1800 people and celebrating all sorts of wildlife from bats to bumblebees and from beaches to bogs.



Photo 2: Bee a Biodiversity explorer event at Glenveagh National Park, Biodiversity Week (Photo credit: Johnny Corry)



Photo 3: Explore the Shore events by the Sea Collective during National Heritage Week 2025. (Photo credit: Donegal County Council)

5.6.4 Practical action for pollinators

Managing spaces for nature is not a new thing in Donegal County Council. You just need walk through Swan Park, Amazing Grace Park or the Bunrana shorefront in summer to see the wonderful array of native wildflowers, native trees, flowering orchards and mini-bee hotels, bolstering Bunrana’s biodiversity year on year. The town gardeners there have been leading the way in terms of biodiversity action and through the delivery of the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan, Council aim to replicate, where possible, this approach in other open spaces. We have already increased the number of sites now being managed better for pollinators and intend to do more in the coming years.

From long flowering meadows, planting ‘Bulbs for Bees’ or planting ‘Trees for Bees’, we aim to keep going and spread this positive action, and the important messaging that goes with it, across the county.



Photo 4 – Spring meadow starting to flower in Swan Park, Buncrana. (Photo credit: George McDermott)



Photo 5 – Donegal County Council staff planting Bulbs for Bees at Letterkenny PSC for Climate Action Week 2025 (photo credit: Charlie Joe Doherty)

Chapter 6: County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan

County Donegal is a county of extraordinary natural beauty and ecological richness. The **County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan (2026–2030)** sets out a clear and ambitious vision:

To protect, restore, and celebrate County Donegal’s biodiversity, ensuring that nature thrives alongside people, and that future generations inherit a county rich in wildlife and healthy ecosystems.

This vision recognises biodiversity not just as something to conserve, but as something to connect with, learn from, and live alongside.

Leading from the breadth of legislation already in place and a range of frameworks as outlined in Chapter 4, the County Donegal Biodiversity Action Plan aims to align with the overarching goals of halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030, restoring degraded habitats to good condition, embedding biodiversity across council functions and partner organisations and supporting community and stakeholder action. The Plan prioritises actions that achieve multiple benefits for biodiversity, climate, water, health and wellbeing, and the economy.

The Donegal BAP is underpinned by the recent County Donegal Species Audits (Fitzgerald Ecology, 2024; 2025), which together provide a recent comprehensive, county-wide overview of Donegal’s biodiversity. The 2024 flora and fungi audit collates over 4,000 taxa and identifies hundreds of priority species of national and regional concern, while the 2025 fauna audit summarises current knowledge for animal groups and sets out a themed programme of future survey and monitoring work.

The Plan will be implemented through partnerships with local, regional and national organisations, including government departments, agencies, NGOs, community groups, landowners, researchers and businesses.

As such, five themes with corresponding objectives frame this Donegal BAP as follows:

- **Theme 1. Data Collection, Mapping and Research**
- **Theme 2. Embedding Biodiversity into Council Operations through Policy and Training**
- **Theme 3. Policy into Practice - How we integrate biodiversity into our work practices**
- **Theme 4. Increasing the awareness and connection to County Donegal's Biodiversity**
- **Theme 5. Working in partnership with our communities and stakeholders**

6.1 Theme 1: Data Collection, Mapping and Research

Objective: Working in partnership with others, Donegal County Council will support research, monitoring and mapping, to better inform and report on biodiversity action in the county.

This theme outlines Donegal County Council's commitment to working collaboratively with partners, communities, and experts to gather, map, and share biodiversity information that will inform action and policy.

Understanding and protecting biodiversity begins with knowledge. In County Donegal, the richness of our natural heritage is both a source of pride and a responsibility. Over the past few years, the *County Donegal Species Audits* (Fitzgerald Ecology, 2024; 2025) have brought together thousands of species records from many different sources, confirming Donegal's exceptional biodiversity and highlighting key gaps in our knowledge. The flora and fungi audit collates over 4,000 taxa across plants, algae, lichens, bryophytes and fungi, while the fauna audit summarises the state of knowledge for animal groups and proposes a programme of priority surveys. These Audits show that Donegal is a county of national importance for many species and habitats, but also that data is uneven. Some groups (such as birds and vascular plants) and some locations (such as Gleann Bheatha, Lough Swilly and Inishowen) are relatively well recorded, while others, especially invertebrates, marine and intertidal fauna, uplands, bogs, small wetlands and offshore islands, remain under-surveyed. They also point to the need for more structured, repeatable monitoring to complement opportunistic records and citizen science.

Through a coordinated approach, we aim to continue to audit species and habitats, monitor ecological change, and identify areas of high biodiversity value. From surveying council-managed lands and important habitats, to mapping ecological networks, these actions will help us pinpoint where protection, restoration, and enhancement efforts are most needed.

We also recognise the importance of local knowledge and citizen engagement. By supporting citizen science, upskilling biodiversity recorders, and consulting with landowners, we will ensure that data collection is inclusive, locally informed, and sustained over time. This evidence base will not only guide our own work but will also empower communities, researchers, and decision-makers to act with confidence and clarity in support of biodiversity.

Theme 1. Data collection, mapping and research

Objective: Working in partnership with others, Donegal County Council will support research, monitoring and mapping, to better inform and report on biodiversity action in the county.

Action No.	Action	Key Performance Indicators
1.1	Coordinate and share a County Donegal Species Audit and target priority species and habitats for follow up projects.	Audit report complete and publicly available by 2026
1.2	Support county habitat and key species surveys, helping to establish baselines and monitor change.	No. of surveys completed each year
1.3	Undertake a Council Landbank Biodiversity Audit by surveying and mapping key Council managed sites and buildings with the aim to identify potential biodiversity protection, enhancement and restoration initiatives.	No. of sites and buildings surveyed each year
1.4	Support the development of Ecological Network Maps of key settlements in County Donegal that model existing biodiversity assets and identify opportunities for potential habitat creation.	No. of maps and reports supported by 2030
1.5	Support the surveying and mapping of important biodiversity areas and undertake consultation with local landowners.	Desktop and GIS maps complete by 2028
1.6	Map and digitise the locations of trees of veteran, notable or cultural importance using existing data and input from local people.	Consultation and GIS layer complete by 2030
1.7	In partnership with others, explore and support biodiversity research opportunities that discover more about biodiversity in County Donegal.	No. of projects completed by 2030
1.8	Undertake coastal erosion studies in vulnerable coastal areas, implement recommendations where possible and review pressures from tourism and recreational activities.	Studies completed Engagement with tourism and recreational sector complete by 2028
1.9	Engage landowners to identify important habitats and species previously unrecorded and under recorded in County Donegal.	Information gathered and presented from engagement activities by 2030
1.10	Support the upskilling of more biodiversity data recorders to ensure biological record keeping is maintained and increased in County Donegal.	No. of training sessions and participants annually

6.2 Theme 2: Embedding Biodiversity into Council Operations through Policy and Training

Objective: To address gaps in biodiversity policy and ensure consistency in Donegal County Council's protection of biodiversity through policy development

To effectively protect and enhance biodiversity, it is essential that Donegal County Council leads by example. This chapter focuses on embedding biodiversity considerations into the heart of council operations, through robust policy development, staff training, and the integration of biodiversity into everyday decision-making.

Recognising the need for consistency and clarity, the council will review its internal procedures to align with national biodiversity obligations and develop a suite of policies that address key issues such as invasive species, pesticide use, and tree management. These policies will be supported by a Biodiversity Best Practice Manual, translating legislation and ecological principles into practical guidance for staff across departments.

Training and capacity building are central to this approach. By equipping staff with the knowledge and tools to consider biodiversity in their work, from planning and projects to coastal management, invasive species control and grant schemes, the council can ensure that biodiversity is not an afterthought, but a core value embedded in all operations.

Theme 2. Embedding Biodiversity into Council operations through policy and training.

Objective: To address gaps in biodiversity policy and ensure consistency in Donegal County Council's protection of biodiversity through policy development

Action No.	Action	Key Performance Indicators
2.1	Review council operations and procedures to identify alignment opportunities with the National Biodiversity Action Plan local authority actions & Biodiversity Duty requirements.	Review complete end of 2026
2.2	Create a Biodiversity Best Practice Manual that translates biodiversity legislation and best practice into practical procedures and protocols.	Best practice manual complete by 2027
2.3	Roll out training to relevant staff and contractors using the Donegal County Council Biodiversity Best Practice Manual, covering themes such as but not exhaustive: hedge management, bat survey protocols, working near watercourses etc.	No. of training sessions delivered & no. of staff attending annually
2.4	Develop a suite of Donegal County Council Policies to address best practice biodiversity management including Invasive Alien Species, Pesticide Reduction and Trees.	DCC policies developed & adopted by 2030
2.5	Support the conservation of marine habitats in line with national plans and policies.	Programmes or projects supported as required
2.6	Develop a code of practice for any works taking place on or near to sand dunes and other sensitive coastal and freshwater habitats.	Code of practice in place by 2028
2.7	Through the application of policies BIO-P-1 to BIO-P-5 of the County Donegal Development Plan 2024 – 2030, play a role in protecting biodiversity by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that new developments do not have significant adverse effects on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites, • Protecting other designated sites e.g. pNHAs, RAMSAR and Nature Reserves, and • Safeguarding existing biodiversity in the wider environment. 	Evidence of policies applied
2.8	Integrate biodiversity best practice into guidance documents for Donegal County Council grant schemes such as Tidy Towns, Climate Action and community funds.	Biodiversity Checklist mechanism in place by 2027
2.9	Carry out appropriate biodiversity surveys and seek to enhance local biodiversity where possible through Council schemes, such as but not limited to, bridge maintenance, housing developments, regeneration projects, capital projects, greenways, roads projects, trail development and amenity provision.	No. of projects with biodiversity mitigation and/or enhancements included annually

6.3 Theme 3: Policy into Practice - How we integrate biodiversity into our work practices

Objective: To turn policy into practice and ensure our policies for best practice biodiversity management are realised through the management of our green spaces, public areas and estate, where possible.

With strong policies and training frameworks in place, the next step is to bring these commitments to life, on the ground and in the spaces that council manage every day. This chapter focuses on translating Donegal County Council's biodiversity policies into tangible, visible action across our parks, public lands, buildings and green spaces.

Through informed land management, the council will lead by example in demonstrating how biodiversity can be protected, enhanced, and restored in practical ways. From controlling invasive alien species (IAS) and managing semi-natural habitats, to planting native trees and supporting pollinators, these actions reflect a shift toward nature-positive stewardship of our public realm.

The council's Landbank Biodiversity Audit plays a central role in identifying opportunities for habitat management and restoration on our own patch, while partnerships with communities and stakeholders ensure that local knowledge and values are embedded in our approach.

Theme 3. Policy into Practice: How we integrate biodiversity into our work practices

Objective: To turn policy into practice and ensure our policies for best practice biodiversity management are realised through the management of our green spaces, public areas and estate, where possible.

Action No.	Action	Key Performance Indicators
3.1	Continue to survey, map and regularly update IAS distribution on Donegal County Council managed land to create a comprehensive and dynamic database.	IAS Maps updated annually
3.2	Create and implement Invasive Alien Species management plans for key Invasive Alien Species on Donegal County Council managed lands.	No. of IAS plans in place by 2030 No. of sites being managed annually
3.3	Trial alternative IAS control methods with the view to replicating more widely	No. of trials by 2030
3.4	Through Council Landbank Biodiversity Audit, identify existing semi-natural habitats such as grasslands, woodlands, wetlands and hedgerows, develop and implement management plans as required.	No. of management plans in place Funding secured to deliver appropriate management
3.5	Plant native and pollinator friendly trees on council managed land through woodland creation, replacement planting, landscaping and capital works schemes.	No. of trees planted annually
3.6	At key sites, manage amenity grassland areas as short and long flowering meadows in line with All Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) guidance.	No. and area of amenity grassland managed in line with AIPP guidance annually
3.7	Incorporate other suitable AIPP Local Authority actions into Donegal County Council procedures and projects where possible such as bee boxes, bee banks and green roofs	AIPP actions reported annually to NBDC
3.8	Promote the planting of new native hedgerows through Council projects at appropriate locations.	Length of native hedgerow planted annually
3.9	To work in partnership with key stakeholders to establish a best practice conservation and management scheme for historic graveyards in County Donegal.	Conservation and management scheme in operation by 2030
3.10	Work with local communities and appropriate agencies to raise awareness about the damage caused by illegal sand and stone removal from coastal habitats and seek opportunities to support enforcement.	No. of engagement activities complete by 2030

3.11	Identify suitable nest and roost box sites on Council land and estate to support species such as barn owls, swifts and bats and erect these where possible.	No. of boxes erected and utilised by 2030
3.12	Explore and undertake biodiversity friendly public lighting where feasible and deliver the ongoing public lighting LED Retrofit and Energy Reduction Programme, while having due regard to impact of light used on biodiversity	No. of biodiversity friendly lighting practices in place by 2030
3.13	Working with others, investigate and support the incorporation of Nature based Solutions (NbS) into Council led projects such as the use of peatland restoration, native tree planting, SuDs and green roofs in a variety of projects and scales, utilizing the LAWPRO NbS guide https://lawwaters.ie/nbs-guidance-documents-and-resources/	No. of NbS initiatives delivered by 2030

6.4 Theme 4: Increasing the awareness and connection to County Donegal's Biodiversity

Objective: To foster a deeper connection between people and nature across County Donegal by raising awareness, encouraging active participation, and supporting inclusive, community-led initiatives that celebrate and protect our local biodiversity.

Connecting people with biodiversity is central to delivering Donegal County Council's Biodiversity Action Plan. When individuals learn about local wildlife and gain conservation skills, they become empowered to take action together. By involving a broad range of people, Donegal County Council aims to help as many as possible understand the importance of protecting biodiversity and why urgent action is needed. Biodiversity is everywhere. In the birdsong from hedges, the wildflowers along the roadside, and the buzzing of bees in your garden. But sometimes, we don't notice it. Theme 4 is all about helping people across County Donegal reconnect with the nature around them and understand why it matters.

Donegal County Council wants to make it easier for everyone to get involved. Whether it's joining a guided nature walk, taking part in a citizen science project, planting trees, or learning how to care for local habitats, there are so many ways to take action. We'll be supporting events, talks, creative projects, and hands-on volunteer days that bring people together and build a shared love for our local wildlife.

We also want to make sure people have access to the right information and support. That means sharing advice online and in person, helping people find funding, and promoting national programmes that get young people involved. From school gardens to community meadows, from art inspired by nature to biodiversity-friendly graveyards, there's a place for everyone in to do their bit for nature.



Illustration © Ruth Graham

Theme 4. Increasing the awareness and connection to County Donegal's Biodiversity

Objective: To foster a deeper connection between people and nature across County Donegal by raising awareness, encouraging active participation, and supporting inclusive, community-led initiatives that celebrate and protect our local biodiversity

Action No.	Action	Key Performance Indicators
4.1	Coordinate and promote a variety of events, walks and talks for a range of people to learn about and experience local biodiversity, especially during themed weeks and programmes that Donegal County Council celebrate, such as Bealtaine, National Biodiversity Week, National Heritage Week, Climate Action Week, Wainfest, Science Week and Skills for Life	No. of walks, talks, events and participants annually
4.2	Promote awareness raising initiatives that champion key habitats and species, special to County Donegal.	No. of initiatives promoted annually
4.3	Promote and support species recording initiatives and citizen science schemes in partnership with the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) such as Bioblitz days, Flower Insect Timed Counts, Butterfly transects etc.	No. of NBDC schemes promoted and supported annually
4.4	Through in-person and via online platforms, provide information and guidance to the public, landowners and other stakeholders on a wide range of biodiversity topics including the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, Invasive Alien Species and key habitat and species management.	No. of biodiversity information queries answered annually No. of biodiversity literature disseminated annually
4.5	Create a directory of available biodiversity funding and communicate widely.	Directory available online and updated annually
4.6	Produce or support the production of interpretation panels and informative literature such as leaflets, books and posters.	No. of panels or publications complete annually
4.7	Incorporate biodiversity into creative, arts and cultural projects and support communities to use biodiversity as a theme in their creative projects.	No. of projects supported annually
4.8	Support biodiversity initiatives targeted at young people and promote national programmes and initiatives such as An Taisce's Green Schools programme and the Heritage Council's Heritage in Schools programme.	Evidence of initiatives supported or promoted annually
4.9	Explore opportunities to support young people and emerging professionals to gain an interest in and experience of delivering biodiversity projects.	No. people supported by 2030

6.5 Theme 5. Working in partnership with our communities and stakeholders

Objective: To build strong, lasting partnerships with communities, landowners, organisations, and stakeholders across County Donegal, empowering collective action for biodiversity through shared knowledge, resources, and responsibility.

Biodiversity thrives when people come together. Whether it's a local tidy towns group planting pollinator-friendly flowers, a farmer restoring a hedgerow, or a school running a nature project, every action counts. This chapter is all about partnership. It's about Donegal County Council working hand-in-hand with communities, landowners, schools, businesses, and national organisations to protect and restore nature across the county.

From supporting biodiversity-friendly farming and citizen science, to helping communities access funding, training, and expert advice, we aim to help build a network of people who care about Donegal's natural heritage. We also aspire to look to the future by exploring opportunities for young people, cross-border collaboration, and long-term investment in biodiversity.

Theme 5. Working in partnership with our communities and stakeholders

Objective: To build strong, lasting partnerships with communities, landowners, organisations, and stakeholders across County Donegal, empowering collective action for biodiversity through shared knowledge, resources, and responsibility.

Action No.	Action	Key Performance Indicators
5.1	Encourage and support communities, residents' groups, businesses and other partners to undertake projects that deliver positive biodiversity actions on public and private land.	No. of projects delivered annually
5.2	Support initiatives that promote sustainable land management and promote biodiversity friendly farming practices, highlighting the range of biodiversity opportunities that can be taken up at farm level.	No. of talks delivered annually No. of initiatives supported annually
5.3	Build capacity among communities to deliver action for biodiversity through targeted training and providing a range of networking opportunities such as conferences, best practice site visits and workshops.	No. of community biodiversity training initiatives & networking events delivered by 2030
5.4	Encourage Tidy Towns groups to be pollinator friendly through advice and support for the Local Authority Pollinator Award in the National Tidy Towns competition.	No. of groups that advice has been provided to, annually Pollinator award part-funded by DCC annually
5.5	Support communities to undertake national citizen science and recording schemes that monitor their local biodiversity	No. of schemes supported annually
5.6	Support health and well-being projects that promote biodiversity best practice and connect people to nature.	No. of projects supported by 2030
5.7	Work in partnership with LAWPRO, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and other relevant groups to promote and support positive awareness raising, training and action to improve the health of watercourses, meeting Water Framework Directive needs.	No. of joint initiatives supported by 2030
5.8	Promote and support projects that are restoring peatlands, where possible.	No. of projects supported and promoted by 2030
5.9	Explore the establishment of a Donegal Biodiversity Education Working Group to harness benefits from collaboration across County Donegal.	Education Working Group set up and meeting regularly by 2027
5.10	Work with Glenveagh National Park to explore synergies in our work and opportunities to build on partnership events, teacher training and project support.	No. of joint initiatives delivered by 2030
5.11	Support and champion the range of LIFE, EIP and other funded partnership projects across County Donegal that aim to enhance and restore biodiversity on a landscape scale.	No. of projects supported by 2030

5.12	Explore opportunities with Educational & Training Board and the education sector to increase opportunities for people to gain biodiversity and conservation skills.	Evidence of exploration by 2030
5.13	Explore cross-border and international projects to deliver joint biodiversity benefits and help build partnership for the future.	No. of projects delivered by 2030
5.14	Explore a mechanism to review and support external funding schemes that may have potential to impact biodiversity or restore it.	Mechanism in place by 2030

6.6 Making It Work - Governance, Funding and Long-Term Delivery

Council recognises the need to ensure a consistent and robust approach to governance, implementation and resourcing to deliver on its legal duties and responsibilities and the ambition set out with this document

To deliver the Donegal County Council Biodiversity Action Plan effectively, a strong governance and coordination framework will be established. This includes creating an internal Biodiversity Implementation Group, supported by sub-groups, to lead on policy development, programme delivery, and progress reporting.

The Council will continue to coordinate the County Donegal Biodiversity Working Group, ensuring collaboration across sectors, and maintain active engagement with the County Donegal Heritage Forum to integrate biodiversity priorities and heritage initiatives.

Close alignment with climate objectives will be achieved through ongoing participation in the cross-directorate Climate Action Team, reinforcing the interdependence of biodiversity and climate resilience.

Securing adequate resources will be a priority, with efforts focused on obtaining external funding to deliver meaningful projects and continues effective engagement and outreach.

Transparent and accountable delivery will be underpinned by annual reporting on the progress of the DCC BAP and compliance with Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan, ensuring that statutory biodiversity duties are met.

Through these actions, Donegal County Council aims to embed biodiversity considerations across all relevant policies and programmes, fostering a collaborative, well-resourced, and results-driven approach to safeguarding the county's natural heritage.

Chapter 7: Do Your Bit for Biodiversity

Backyard Biodiversity

Donegal County Council encourage you to get outdoors and discover what biodiversity lurks in your backyard, local park or where you go for a walk. Our Backyard Biodiversity signposts you to Citizen Science websites, how-to guides and other organisations that are running seasonal campaigns that encourage people to watch and enjoy all the wonderful wildlife that makes their homes in back gardens, local parks and spaces. Find the links at www.donegalculture.ie/en/services/biodiversity/backyard-biodiversity.

Do Your Bit

Farmers and landowners

- If you are a participant in the ACRES agri-environment scheme, engage with your farm advisor or the ACRES CP team to learn how you can further benefit wildlife on your farm. Find out more at <https://www.acresdonegal.ie/>,
- Follow the codes of good agricultural practice,
- Leave field margins uncut later in the season for birds, insects and mammals, and
- Restrict any cutting of hedgerows to every other year, allowing some stretches to flower and fruit each autumn.

Businesses

- Sponsor a local biodiversity project and help make it happen,
- Create your own wildlife garden in your company grounds, and
- Volunteer your staff to lend a hand with local conservation projects which will give your team new skills and help local biodiversity.

Community Groups

- Create a community wildlife garden and increase your local sense of pride and stewardship for the environment,
- Help plant a woodland or preserve a local site for the future, and
- Help implement your local community Biodiversity Action Plan, if you have one or apply to Community Foundation Ireland to get one kick-started! Check out <https://actionforbiodiversity.ie/> for more information.

Individuals

- Help build a better picture of local biodiversity and become a wildlife recorder! Record any sightings of wildlife to the National Biodiversity Data Centre here at www.biodiversityireland.ie,
- Be a Citizen Scientist! Take part in the 'Big River Watch', 'Explore Your Shore' or the Garden Bird Survey and multiple programmes under the All-Ireland Pollinator

Plan for bees, butterflies and other insects. Go to these websites to find out more; <https://theriverstrust.org/take-action/the-big-river-watch>, <https://exploreyourshore.ie/surveys/>, <https://birdwatchireland.ie/our-work/surveys-research/research-surveys/irish-garden-bird-survey/>, and <https://biodiversityireland.ie/monitoring/>.

- Have a go at wildlife gardening and enjoy the small wonders in your own patch. Or why not create a street garden and encourage your neighbours to do one thing for biodiversity in their gardens too,
- The Heritage Council have produced a delightful Gardening for Biodiversity booklet (<https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/Gardening-For-Biodiversity.pdf>) as well as a series of short films (www.heritagecouncil.ie/advice-and-guidance/gardening-for-biodiversity) with simple steps you can take in your garden for biodiversity,
- Create your own compost heap, reducing your waste and reducing the need for peat compost,
- Report wildlife crime. Incidents such as dumping and water pollution should not be ignored, as these have an impact on local biodiversity. Local people are ideally placed to report such activities, and this can go a long way towards preventing further decline of our habitats and species. Find out more at <https://www.npws.ie/wildlife-crime>, and
- Volunteer! There are always local projects that need the help of volunteers and give people a chance to learn about helping their local wildlife. These could be tree planting days, bird box making, scrub clearance or even hay making.

Stay Updated

To find out more about how you can help protect and restore biodiversity, contact the Biodiversity Officer at Donegal County Council.

Tel: **074 91 53900**

Email: biodiversity@donegalcoco.ie

Web: www.donegalculture.ie/en/services/biodiversity/

Chapter 8: Appendices

Appendix 1. Designated sites in County Donegal

Site	SAC	SPA	Ramsar Site	NHA	Code
Aran Island (Donegal) Cliffs	●				111
Ballintra	●				115
Ballyarr Wood	●				116
Ballyhoorisky Point to Fanad Head	●				1975
Ballyness Bay	●				1090
Cloghernagore Bog & Glenveagh National Park	●				2047
Coolvoy Bog	●				1107
Croaghonagh Bog	●				129
Donegal Bay (Murvagh)	●	●			133 & 4151
Dunmuckrum Turloughs	●				2303
Dunragh Loughs/Pettigo Plateau	●	●	●		1125 & 4099 & 334
Durnesh Lough	●	●			138 & 4145
Fawnboy Bog/Lough Nacung	●				140
Gannivegil Bog	●				142
Gweedore Bay And Islands	●				1141
Hempton's Turbot Bank	●				2999
Horn Head and Rinclevan	●				147
Inishtrahull	●	●			154 & 4100
Kindrum Lough	●				1151

Site	SAC	SPA	Ramsar Site	NHA	Code
Leannan River	●				2176
Lough Eske And Ardnamona Wood	●				163
Lough Golagh And Breesy Hill	●				2164
Lough Melvin	●				428
Lough Nageage	●				2135
Lough Nagreany Dunes	●				164
Lough Nillan Bog (Carrickatlieve)	●	●			165 & 4110
Lough Swilly	●	●			2287 & 4075
Magheradrumman Bog	●				168
Meenaguse Scragh	●				1880
Meenaguse/Ardbane Bog	●				172
Meentygrannagh Bog	●				173
Muckish Mountain	●				1179
Mulroy Bay	●				2159
North Inishowen Coast	●				2012
Rathlin O'Birne Island	●	●			181 & 4120
River Finn	●				2301
Rutland Island and Sound	●				2283
Sessiagh Lough	●				183
Sheephaven	●				1190
Slieve League	●				189
Slieve Tooley/Tormore Island/Loughros Beg Bay	●				190
St. John's Point	●				191
Tamur Bog	●				1992

Site	SAC	SPA	Ramsar Site	NHA	Code
Termon Strand	●				1195
Tory Island Coast	●	●			2259 & 4073
Tranarossan And Melmore Lough	●				194
West Of Ardara/Maas Road	●				197
Derryveagh and Glendowan Mountains		●			4039
Falcarragh to Meenlaragh		●			
Fanad Head		●			4148
Greers Isle		●			4082
Horn Head to Fanad Head		●			4194
Illancrone & Inishkeeragh		●			4132
Inch Lough & Levels		●			4083
Inishbofin, Inishdooyey and Inishbeg		●			4115
Inishduff		●			4116
Inishkeel		●			4149
Lough Derg (Donegal)		●			4060
Lough Fern		●			4087
Malin Head		●			4165
Roaninish		●			4121
Sheskinmore Lough		●			4090
Trawbreaga Bay		●	●		4034 & 841
West Donegal Coast		●			4150
West Donegal Islands		●			4230
Lough Barra Bog			●		373
Meenachullion			●		475
Barnesmore Bog				●	2375

Site	SAC	SPA	Ramsar Site	NHA	Code
Camowen River Bog				●	2405
Cashelnavean Bog				●	122
Corveen Bog				●	1108
Crocknamurrin Mountain Bog				●	1878
Illies Hill Bog				●	1127
Lough Fad Bog				●	1159
Lough Hill Bog				●	2452
Meenagarranroe Bog				●	2437
Meenmore West Bog				●	2453
Slieve Snaght Bogs				●	2322
Umrycam Bog Bog				●	2406

Appendix 2. Glossary and Bibliography

Glossary of technical and policy terms

Term	Definition
Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES)	An Irish agri-environmental scheme promoting sustainable farming.
All-Ireland Pollinator Plan	A framework to protect pollinators and promote pollinator-friendly practices.
Annex I Habitats	Habitats listed under the EU Habitats Directive as requiring special conservation measures.
Appropriate Assessment	An assessment to ensure projects do not adversely affect protected sites.
Biodiversity	The variety of plant and animal life in the world or in a particular habitat.
Biodiversity Duty	A legal obligation for public bodies to consider biodiversity in their functions.
Blue Infrastructure	Water-based natural features that provide ecological and social benefits.
Carbon Sequestration	The process of capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide.
Citizen Science	Scientific research conducted by amateur or non-professional scientists.
Climate Action Plan	A strategic plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change.
Climate Adaptation	Adjustments in systems to minimize harm from climate change impacts.
Convention on Biological Diversity	An international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.
Corncrake LIFE	An EU LIFE project aimed at conserving the corncrake bird species in Ireland.
Ecosystem Services	The benefits humans obtain from ecosystems, including provisioning, regulating, and cultural services.
Environmental Impact Assessment	A study to predict environmental consequences of proposed projects.
EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030	A European plan to halt biodiversity loss and restore ecosystems.
EU Birds Directive	European law for the protection of all wild bird species and their habitats.
EU Habitats Directive	European law aimed at conserving natural habitats and wild species.
EU Water Framework Directive	EU legislation to protect and improve water quality across member states.
Green Infrastructure	A network of natural and semi-natural areas designed to deliver ecosystem services.
Habitat Fragmentation	The breaking up of continuous habitats into smaller, isolated patches.
Invasive Alien Species Management	Control and prevention of non-native species that threaten ecosystems.

LIFE on Machair	An EU LIFE project supporting restoration of machair systems and associated species.
Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan	A plan developed by local authorities to conserve biodiversity at county level.
National Biodiversity Action Plan	Ireland's strategic plan to conserve and restore biodiversity.
National Planning Framework	Ireland's long-term strategy for spatial planning and sustainable development.
Natura 2000	A network of protected areas across the European Union aimed at conserving biodiversity.
Natural Heritage Areas	Sites designated for the protection of wildlife and natural features in Ireland.
Nature Reserve	A tract of land managed for the conservation of wildlife and habitats.
Nature Restoration Law	EU legislation mandating restoration of degraded ecosystems.
Nature-based Solutions	Actions that use natural processes to address societal challenges like climate change.
Peatland Restoration	The process of rewetting and rehabilitating degraded peatlands.
pNHA	Proposed Natural Heritage Area, identified as important for biodiversity but not yet legally protected.
Pollinator Plan	A strategy to protect pollinating insects and their habitats.
Ramsar	An international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.
Results-Based Payment Scheme	A scheme that rewards landowners based on environmental outcomes.
Rights of Nature	A legal concept granting ecosystems and species inherent rights to exist and thrive.
Special Areas of Conservation	Protected sites designated under EU law to conserve important habitats and species.
Special Protection Areas	Areas classified under EU Birds Directive for the protection of wild birds.
Strategic Environmental Assessment	A systematic process for evaluating environmental effects of plans and programmes.
UN Sustainable Development Goals	Global goals adopted by the UN to achieve a sustainable future by 2030.
Wild Atlantic Nature	An EU-funded project focused on restoring peatlands and habitats in Ireland's northwest.
Wildlife Act	Irish legislation providing for the protection of wildlife and habitats.
Whole-of-Government Approach	Coordinated action across all government departments to achieve common goals.
Whole-of-Society Approach	Inclusive action involving all sectors of society to address major challenges.

Bibliography

1. Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2019) *Ireland's 6th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.
2. Environmental Protection Agency (2024) *Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024*. Wexford: EPA.
3. European Commission (1992) *Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (Habitats Directive)*. Official Journal of the European Communities, L206, pp. 7–50.
4. European Commission (1979) *Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds (Birds Directive)*. Official Journal of the European Communities, L103, pp. 1–18.
5. European Commission (2009) *Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Conservation of Wild Birds*. Official Journal of the European Union, L20, pp. 7–25.
6. European Commission (2020) *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing Nature Back into Our Lives*. Brussels: European Commission.
7. Fitzgerald Ecology (2024; 2025) *County Donegal Species Audits*. Donegal: Fitzgerald Ecology.
8. Fossitt, J.A. (2000) *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland*. Kilkenny: The Heritage Council.
9. Government of Ireland (2023) *Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023–2030*. Dublin: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
10. Government of Ireland (2024) *Climate Action Plan 2024*. Dublin: Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.
11. Heritage Council (2021) *Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Guidelines*. Kilkenny: The Heritage Council.
12. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) (2019) *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Summary for Policymakers*. Bonn: IPBES Secretariat.
13. National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) (2025) *Protected Sites and Nature Reserves in County Donegal*. Dublin: NPWS.
14. Ó Gaoithín, S. (2023) *Coillte Dúchasacha Chontae Dhún na nGall / Native Woodlands of County Donegal*. Donegal: Author.
15. Wildlife Act 1976 (No. 39 of 1976). Dublin: Government of Ireland.
16. Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 (No. 38 of 2000). Dublin: Government of Ireland.
17. Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2010 (No. 19 of 2010). Dublin: Government of Ireland.
18. Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2012 (No. 29 of 2012). Dublin: Government of Ireland.



Illustration by Leah Sweeney



**Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall**
Donegal County Council



Ceangal

Clár den **Chomhairle Oidhreachta**
A Heritage Council programme