

Return To Nature Biodiversity Initiative

Barry O'Loughlin (Biodiversity Officer)
29th November 2023



COMHAIRLE CONTAE AN CHLÁIR
CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL



‘Return To Nature’ Biodiversity Initiative

- Irish Bishops Conference on Biodiversity Loss
- Decided that 30% of Church Grounds be set aside for Biodiversity by 2030 – ‘Return to Nature’ biodiversity initiative
- Clare a pilot county to support the initiative in Ireland
- Bishop of Killaloe Fintan Monahan, Clare County Council’s Biodiversity Officer Barry O’Loughlin and Laudator Sí Officer (Trocaire) met to roll out initiative in Clare and to sign up 10 parishes in Clare

News / Living Faith / Climate Justice

IRISH CHURCHES ARE COMMITTING 30 PERCENT OF THEIR LAND TO POLLINATORS

BY SARAH MACDONALD, NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER

AUG 22, 2023

SHARE



Irish bishops have asked parishes across Ireland to set aside 30 percent of their grounds for pollinators and biodiversity by 2030 so the land can be enjoyed “in perpetuity by the whole community.”

With 1,365 parishes that include 2,646 churches across 26 dioceses on the island of Ireland, the initiative has the potential to make a difference to local biodiversity as well as create awareness of global

10 Clare Parishes – Diocese of Killaloe

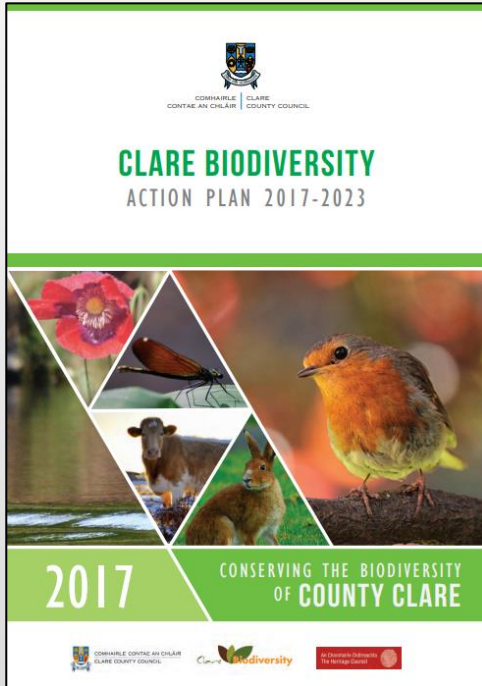
- Kilkee
- Kilmaley
- Clarecastle
- Broadford
- Kilrush
- Killimer
- Cooraclare
- Inagh and Kilnamona
- Mullagh
- Milltown-Malbay



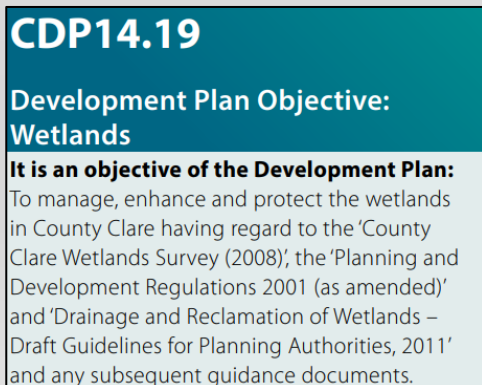
Biodiversity of Clare



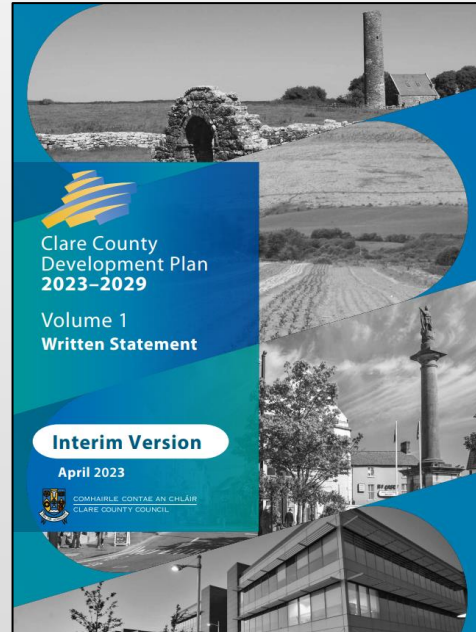
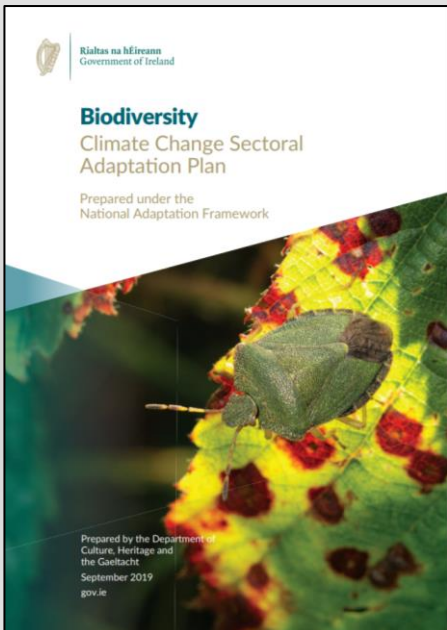
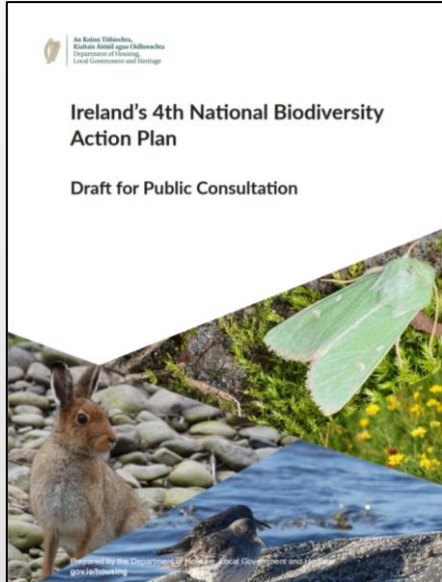
Current Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023



- Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023 comprises 67 objectives
- Underpinned by the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023
- Runs in parallel with the Clare County Development Plan
- Informed through Public Consultation



4th Clare Biodiversity Action Plan



- Next Biodiversity Action Plan will be underpinned by Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (Draft)
- Will run in parallel with the County Development Plan 2024-2030 - 30 Strategic Biodiversity Actions. CDP statutory document supports the framework of a county Biodiversity Action Plan
- Biodiversity actions implemented as part of the 'Return to Nature' initiative will be key to delivering actions for the next Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2030

Recent Trends of Biodiversity Decline in Ireland



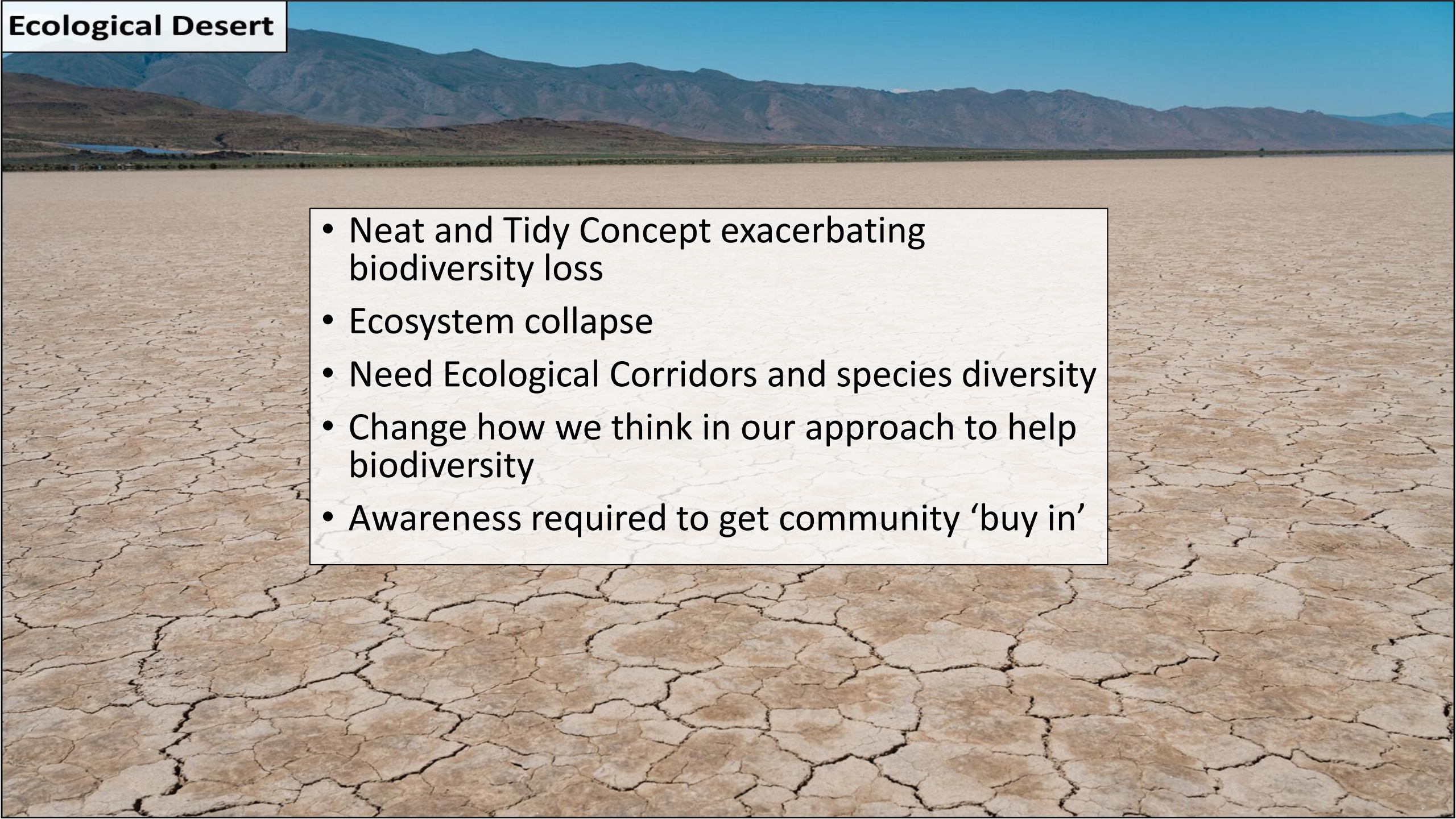
- Article 17 reports (2019): 85% of EU habitats are reported as being in 'Unfavourable' status
- 30% of EU listed species are assessed as being of Unfavourable status (i.e. Inadequate and Bad)
- Birds of Conservation Concern (Gilbert *et al.*, (2021)) - A total of 54 Irish bird species (26%) are now on the Red List (23 species have moved onto the Red List and only six species have left it since 2013 – 46% increase)
- Recent State of the World's Birds report (BirdLife International, 2022) identified 63% of Irish birds as declining
- Regional Red List Of Irish Bees (2006) – decline in pollinators (50%) since 1980 (2 species extinct in last 80 years)
- Plant Atlas 2020 (published 2022) - more than half Ireland and UK's native plant species are in decline, with native grasslands suffering the largest decline.
- Irish Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (2021) – 35% decline in Irish population

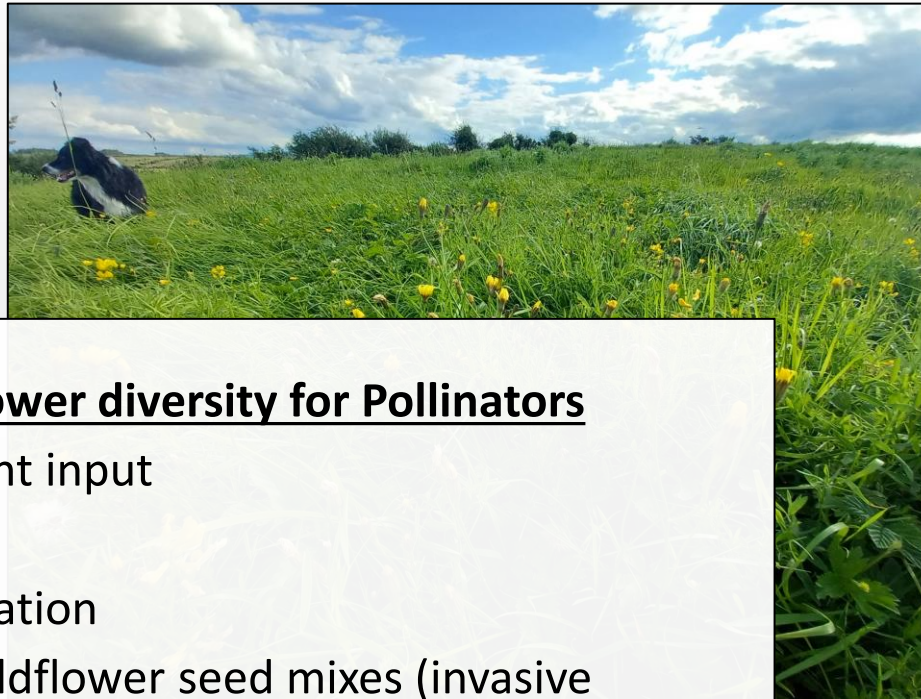
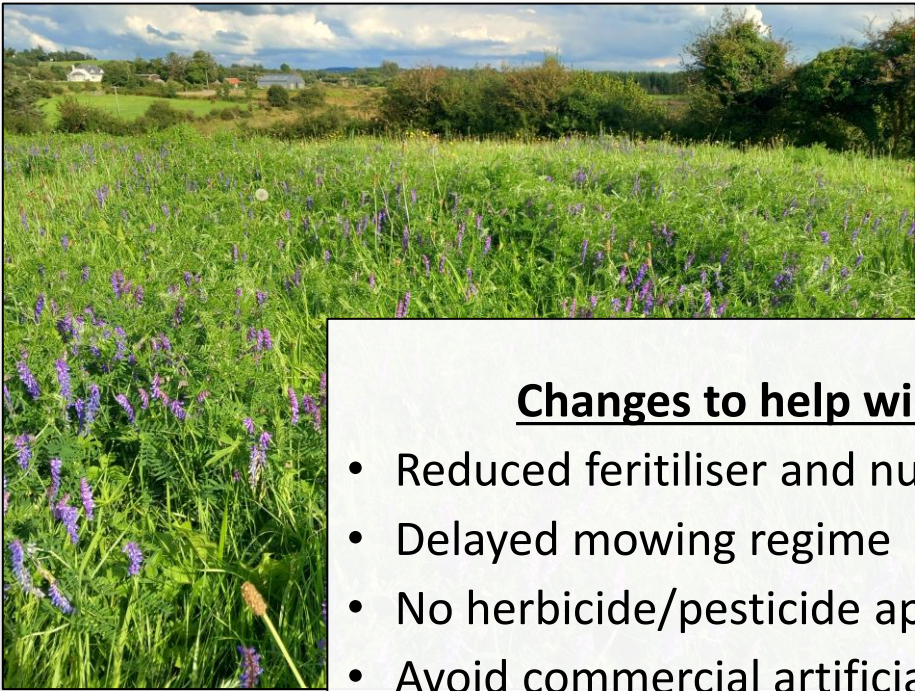


- Neat and Tidy Concept
- 3-4 species (monoculture)(Daisy, Clover and grasses). Limited diversity of wildflowers to provide a nectar source for insects
- Ornamental non-native shrubs
- Limited potential for pollinators and biodiversity



Ecological Desert

- 
- Neat and Tidy Concept exacerbating biodiversity loss
 - Ecosystem collapse
 - Need Ecological Corridors and species diversity
 - Change how we think in our approach to help biodiversity
 - Awareness required to get community 'buy in'



Changes to help wildflower diversity for Pollinators

- Reduced fertiliser and nutrient input
- Delayed mowing regime
- No herbicide/pesticide application
- Avoid commercial artificial wildflower seed mixes (invasive species)
- **Increase in plant species diversity = increase in pollinator and butterfly diversity**



- Sneezewort
- Meadow-sweet
- Ox-eye daisy
- Hawksbeard
- Tufted vetch
- Meadow vetchling
- Red Clover
- Dandelion
- Sweet-vernal Grass
- Yorkshire Fog
- Cock's-foot
- Ribwort Plantain
- Buttercup
- Sorrell
- Ragged Robin
- Mouse-ear
- Cuckoo Flower
- Red clover

Bumblebees of Ireland

National Biodiversity Data Centre
www.biodiversityireland.ie

Bumblebees are vital pollinators and a key component of Ireland's biodiversity. There are 21 different species. The National Biodiversity Data Centre is mapping their distribution and tracking how populations are changing. Help by recording your sightings at: records.biodiversityireland.ie



All Ireland Pollinator Plan Initiatives

Ashy Mining Bee

#NoMow May

Don't mow, let it grow
Join the buzz to save the bees

www.pollinators.ie

Pic: Lill Dunne



- 'No Mow May' Campaign
- Create a short flowering '6-week meadow' (cut every 4 to 6 weeks)
- Reduce mowing to create a wildflower meadow (cut and lift)
- Create a pollinator friendly hedgerow
- Plant a mini-Orchard

National Biodiversity Data Centre
A Heritage Council Programme



All-Ireland Pollinator Plan

Wildflower Meadow Management Example



June 2021 – Before Management



Cut once in early September and remove grass cuttings to avoid nutrient input. Wildflower seeds fall off cut grass and anchor to ground before winter dormancy. No fertilizer or nutrient input



Increase in diversity of wildflowers such as common spotted orchid, hawksbeard, meadowsweet



More wildflowers provide a nectar source for pollinators

Hedgerows and Mini-Orchards

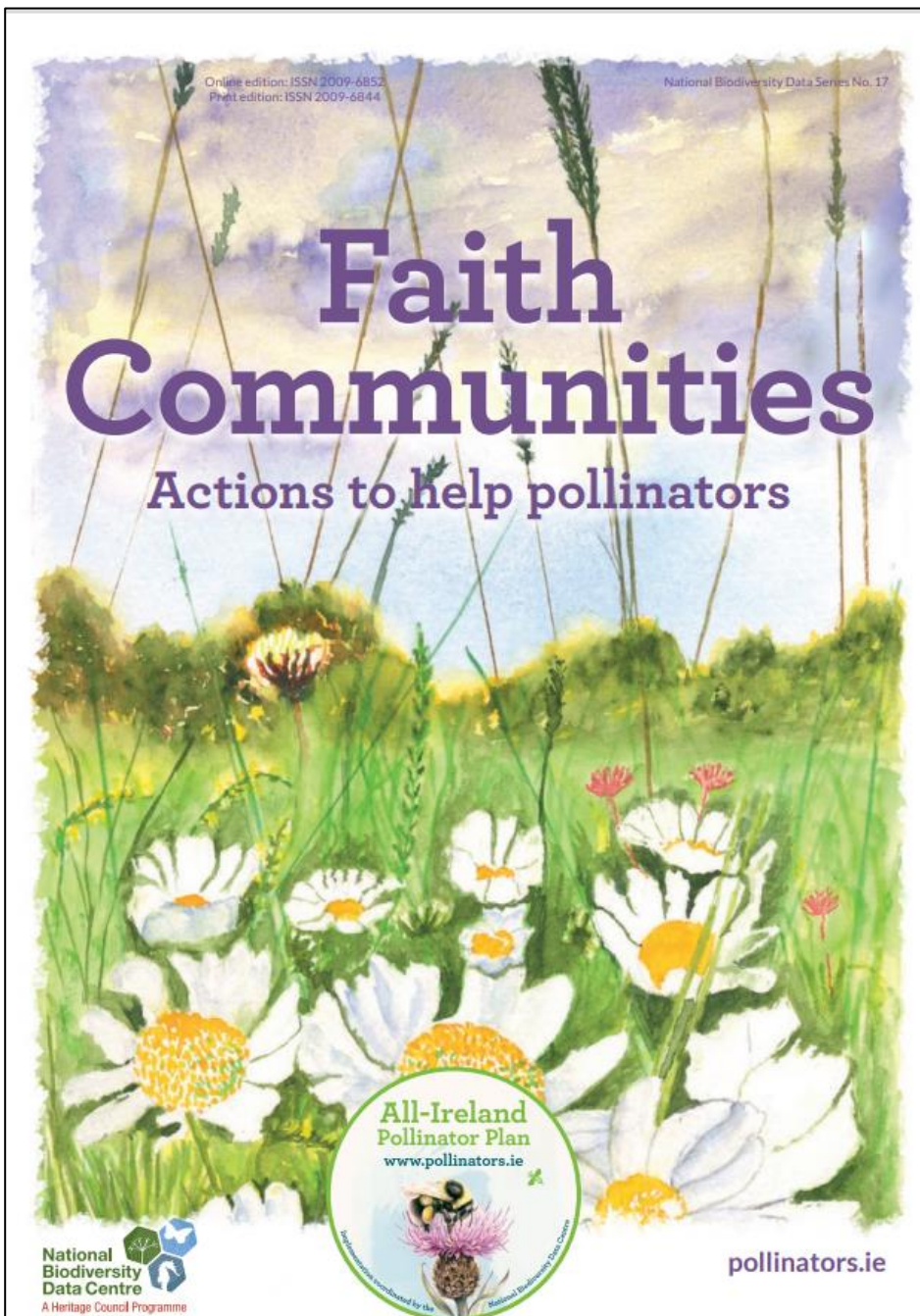


Lees Road (GAA Pitch)



Bee Hotel





Summary table of possible **ACTIONS** to help pollinators

(these are options – you don't have to do all!)

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Action 1: | Elect and mandate an ecological or environmental group within your congregation to take responsibility for implementing pollinator-friendly actions. |
| Action 2: | Identify & protect existing sources of food and shelter for pollinators on land managed by your faith community |
| Action 3: | Protect any native hedgerows and allow them to flower in spring |
| Action 4: | Cut grass as normal but let the Dandelions bloom! |
| Action 5: | Create a short-flowering meadow (wildflower lawn) |
| Action 6: | Create a long-flowering meadow |
| Action 7: | Plant pollinator-friendly trees and shrubs |
| Action 8: | Plant perennial flowers for pollinators |
| Action 9: | Plant bulbs for pollinators |
| Action 10: | Provide nesting areas for Bumblebees |
| Action 11: | Provide nesting areas for mining solitary bees |
| Action 12: | Provide nesting areas for cavity-nesting solitary bees |
| Action 13: | Eliminate the use of herbicides in as many areas as possible |
| Action 14: | Ensure best practise where the use of herbicides cannot be avoided |
| Action 15: | Promote the Junior Pollinator Plan |
| Action 16: | Integrate the need to safeguard the earth into prayer/worship |
| Action 17: | Have a congregation action day |
| Action 18: | Distribute pollinator-friendly garden guidelines to homes in the congregation |
| Action 19: | Put up All-Ireland Pollinator Plan signage |
| Action 20: | Help spread the message to your faith community and beyond |
| Action 21: | Support pollinators in areas of the developing world |
| Action 22: | Apply to any relevant Eco Awards |
| Action 23: | Log your 'Actions for Pollinators' on the mapping system |
| Action 24: | Do a survey to record and identify the pollinators found on land managed by your faith community |

<https://pollinators.ie/>

- Specific targeted actions to manage some areas of the church grounds for pollinators have been published as part of the 'All Ireland Pollinator Plan' by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. Download at <https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Faith-Communities-Pollinator-Guidelines-2022-WEB.pdf>

Pollinator Grassland Management



- Avoid commercial artificial wildflower seed mixes (invasive species; black grass)
- Create a small space on church grounds for pollinators
- Cut every 4-6 weeks and remove cuttings
- Pollinator signs can be provided as part of biodiversity initiative
- Can mow 'path' through long grass to provide access
- Link in with local schools to set up a quadrat and identify plants and bees
- Remember to consult with <https://pollinators.ie/>



Kilrush



Mullagh



Kilkee



Kilmaley

- Some churches will have more space than others to manage areas for pollinators

Swift Nest Boxes



- Red-listed bird species of conservation concern (BoCCI)
- Swift population in decline. Recent severe declines in their breeding populations using a time period closer to the ideal 25-year period for this category (BoCCI)
- Clare Swift Survey
- Church structures ideal to support nest boxes. Most of the 10 parishes should be suitable for swift boxes.
- Call system associated with nest box to attract swifts to take up occupancy in nest box
- Clean bird – no droppings compared to other species such as pigeons

Swift Nest Boxes



Triple Entry Nest Box



Double Entry Nest Box



Single Entry Nest Box

- Key contact is BirdWatch Ireland
- Urban Birds Project Officer in BirdWatch Ireland will visit churches to inspect suitability for swift nest boxes
- Boxes to be installed at >5 metres high
- <https://genesishnestboxes.ie/genesis-nest-box-materials/installation-instructions/>




Barn Owl Nest Box




- Red-listed bird species of conservation concern (BoCCI)
- Barn owl population in decline attributed to lack of suitable nesting opportunities (BoCCI)
- Clare Barn Owl Nest Box Scheme 2022-Present
- BirdWatch Ireland main partner and will inspect sites for suitability
- Requires suitable tree to install nest box; however if no suitable trees on church grounds, may work with local farmers surrounding church grounds at the edge of the village
- Avoid ash dieback infected trees




- Example of Kilnamona parish. No suitable tree for barn owl nest box within church grounds (yellow circle). Alternative option is to link in with local farmer at the edge of village where potential suitable trees/sheds have been identified to install nest box. Communities asked to identify farmers who may be willing to participate.











AN tSúilíocht Réasúnaíochta
Reasonable Accommodation
Riachtanais agus Fardálachas
Reasonable Needs and Welfare
Requirements



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First Year Results of the 2022 County Clare Barn Owl Nest Box Scheme



Prepared by [BirdWatch Ireland](#) for Clare County Council
October 2023

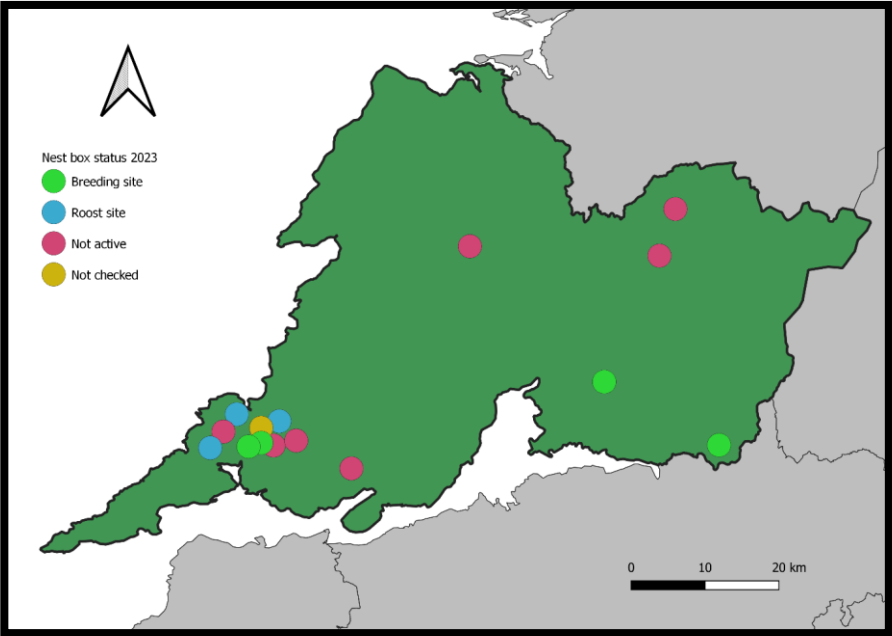
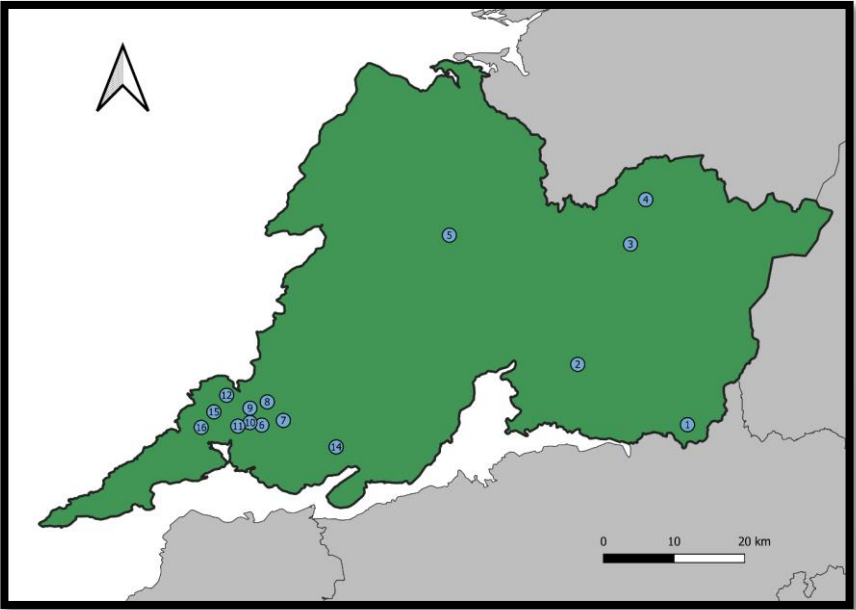


Photo credit: BirdWatch Ireland

Bats



Inagh church supports bats

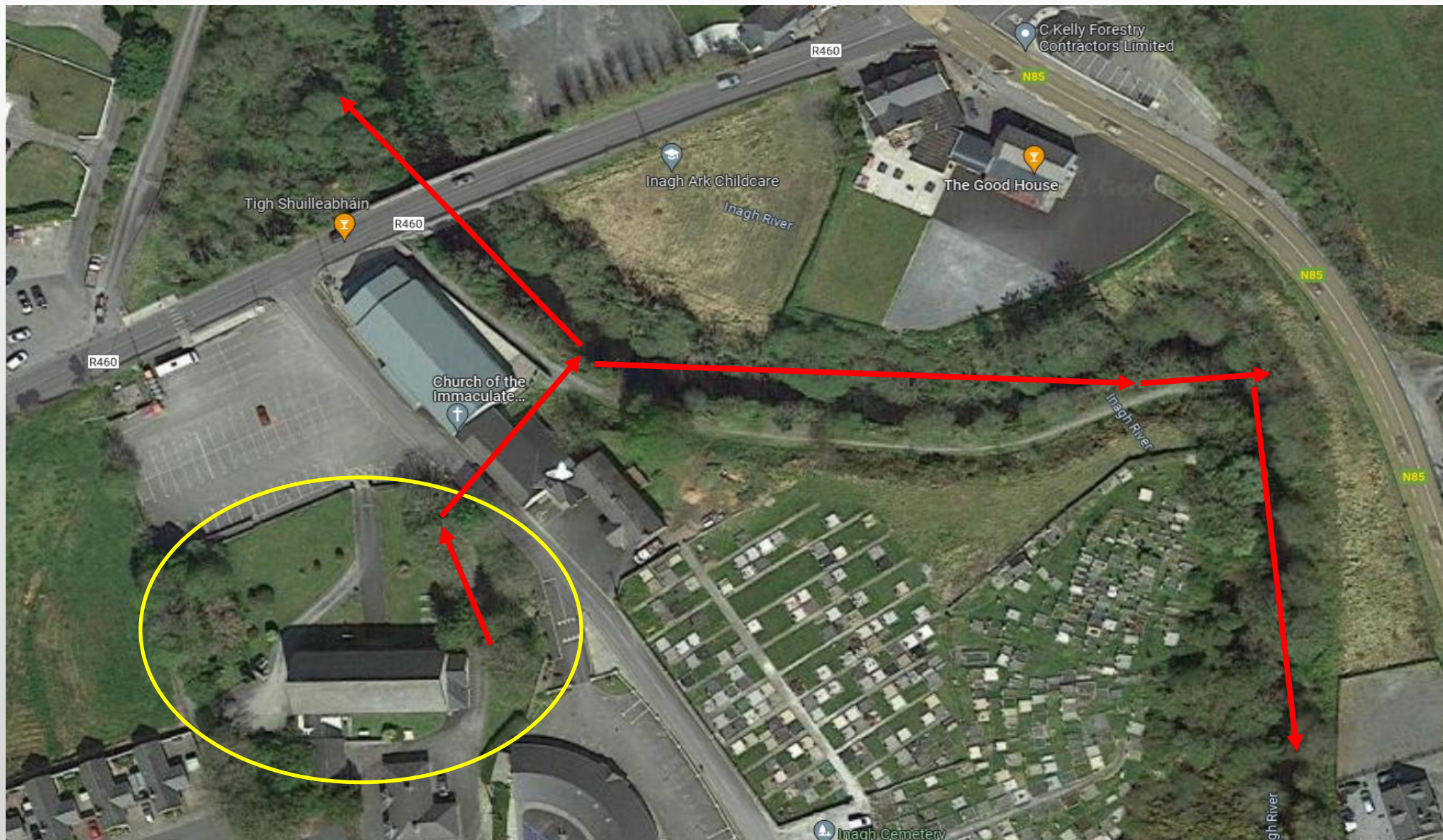


Brown long-eared Bat



Soprano Pipistrelle Bat

- Churches have suitable structures to support bats
- Bats are listed on Annex II and Annex IV of the EU Habitats Directive and protected under the Irish Wildlife Act
- The church buildings provide quiet, sheltered places for bats to live. Bats will take shelter under roof tiles, in porches and eaves for roosting and rearing their young. The churchyard's large old trees provide roosting opportunities for them to live.
- Some churches in the 10 parishes have trees surrounding the buildings while others will not. Not an option for every parish. May require assistance locally to install 3 bat roost boxes in around the church yard. Communities may have a contact
- Local ranger to check church for bats
- Schwegler bat boxes proven to support roosting bats on trees >4m high off ground
- Install boxes on suitable trees
- Monitoring surveys such as 'All Ireland Daubenton's Bat Waterways Survey'



- Example of Inagh church and ecological corridors and habitat connectivity for bats. Bats present in church (yellow circle) will use treeline routes (red arrows) for feeding and commuting where insects are concentrated. Hedgerows and treelines are vital for bats. Placing bat roost boxes on mature trees will enhance bat populations in the community.

Bat Roost Boxes



Schwegler bat roost box



Tree with crevice. No requirement for bat roost box

- Bat roost boxes install two to three per tree
- >4 m high
- Project partner local NPWS ranger and Bat Conservation Ireland
- Target suitable trees within church grounds in conjunction with NPWS
- Avoid ash-dieback infected trees

Tree Planting



- Tree planting of pollinator friendly trees
- Mini Orchard
- Potential to link in with local nursery
- Potential Project Partners: Seed Savers, Trees on the Land



Other Bird Nest Boxes



Treecreeper Nest Box



Open Nest Box



Wren Nest Box



Stockholm 28mm Nest Box



Stockholm 32mm Nest Box

Training Workshops

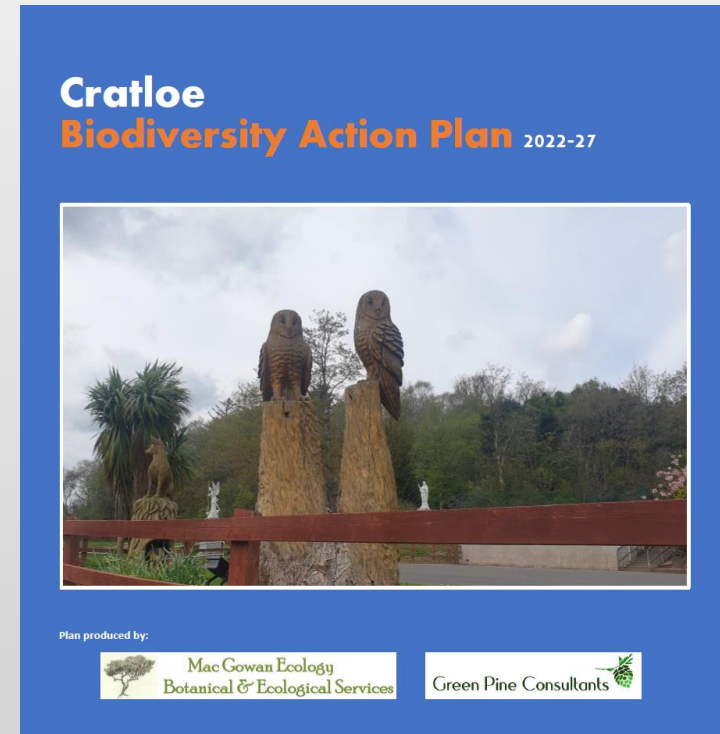
- Roll out Biodiversity Training Workshops/Talks with Key Project Partners (e.g. BirdWatch Ireland, pollinators, local nurseries)
- Pollinator friendly management training
- Bird nest box installation e.g. swift nest boxes and barn owl boxes
- Tree planting
- Invasive Species Community Training
- Clare Local Development Company – potential partnership

Funding the 'Return to Nature' Biodiversity Actions

- Clare County Council's Biodiversity Officer aims to make an application in January 2024 (when this opens) to fund bird and bat boxes, signage and equipment through the local biodiversity action fund (LBAF) in conjunction with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Department of housing planning and local government).
- The Local Biodiversity Action Fund offers funding to assist local authorities in the implementation of the National Biodiversity Action Plan, enabling them to identify and develop projects that address biodiversity loss in their localities.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

- Some communities participating in the 'Return to Nature' biodiversity initiative already have a local biodiversity action plan funded through the Community Foundation Ireland Biodiversity Fund. This fund opens every September and in 2023 it funded the following:
 - **Strand 1:** Grants of up to €5,500 for community groups to work with an ecologist to classify their local habitats, assess their condition and extent, map them, and define a suite of actions to enhance biodiversity.
 - **Strand 2:** Grants of up to €8,000 for community groups who carry out the work outlined in Strand 1 in collaboration with one or two **land managers/owners** and **particularly farmers**, to classify habitats at landscape scale with a focus on field boundaries (hedgerows, treelines and stone walls), assess their condition and extent, map them and define a suite of actions to enhance biodiversity.
 - **Strand 3:** Grants of up to €11,000 for community groups who carry out the work outlined in Strand 1 in collaboration with three to **five land managers/owners** and **particularly farmers**, to classify habitats at landscape scale with a focus on field boundaries (hedgerows, treelines and stone walls), assess their condition and extent, map them and define a suite of actions to enhance biodiversity.



Tidy Towns

- Assessment of participating towns is carried out by an independent panel of adjudicators appointed by the Department of Rural and Community Development and takes place during the months of June, July and August each year, on a date which is not specified.
- Community-Your Planning & Involvement 60
- Streetscape & Public Places 60
- Green Spaces & Landscaping 60
- Nature & Biodiversity in your Locality 50
- Sustainability-Doing more with less 50
- Tidiness & Litter Control 90
- Residential Streets & Housing Areas 50
- Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes 50

Advantages of Participating in the 'Return to Nature' Biodiversity Initiative

- If applying for funding at a future date through the Community Foundation Ireland Biodiversity Fund, you will have grounds for a strong application as the community will have taken measures to support red-listed bird species (e.g. swift and barn owl) and endangered bat populations (bat roost boxes) and engaged in native tree planting and outreach communications. You will have more project partners such as BirdWatch Ireland, NPWS, local farmers and schools
- The biodiversity measures will also help achieve a higher score for participating parishes that have an Active Tidy Towns organisation
- The measures will promote interaction with local schools to record wildlife
- Eligible for Tidy Towns Pollinator Award. Potential win for Clare.

Community Initiatives

Clarecastle Biodiversity Plan 2019-2025



Clarecastle & Ballyea Biodiversity Plan 2019 to 2025



Bee Orchid, Port of Clare, Clarecastle

Biodiversity Plan Team: Catherine O'Connor, Fiona Trahe, Christy Leyden, Roman Leyden, Eric Shaw, Michael Carr & Jean Ryan

All Ireland Pollinator Plan



Cratloe Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-27



Plan produced by:

Mae Gowan Ecology
Botanical & Ecological Services

Green Pine Consultants



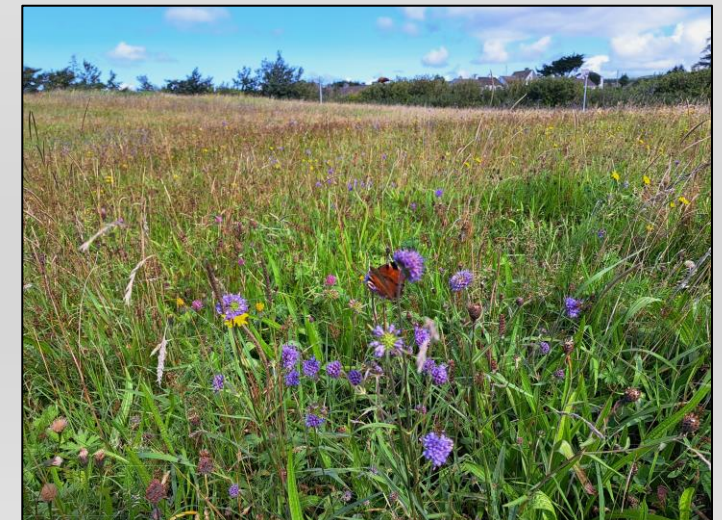
Funded by the Department of Rural & Community Development

Kilkee Biodiversity Plan 2019

From Bog to Beach



Men's Shed, Ennis



Events and Outreach Programmes

- Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme with local schools and Tidy Towns
- Butterfly monitoring scheme
- Tidy Towns Pollinator Award
- National Heritage Week
- National Biodiversity Week
- Training Events in conjunction with Clare Local Development Company and National Biodiversity Data Centre



Clare Local Development Company are offering a LEADER funded 3-month invasive species training, free of charge, to residents living in the Brehin, Kilsesh, Lismacross, Scariff, and Shannon areas. The course which will be delivered on their behalf by Dr Fran Gioseffo and her team will start in March 2023. This is a training with a difference!

Do you know there may be invasive species lurking in your garden, including when plants, trees/shrubs & ornamental plants? We will show you how to spot & remove them.

join.

Please contact the postbox team here or email biodiversityleader@gmail.com.

CLDC Training Programme


Learn how to prevent invasive species introductions.



 **National Heritage Week**
A Heritage Council programme

Biodiversity Week
19th–28th May, 2023:
Wild Clare

www.clarecoco.ie

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CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL


Green-Schools
An Taisce

Ecosystem Goods and Services

- Food security and crops: The annual value of pollinators for human food crops has been estimated at €153 billion world-wide, £603 million in the UK; and at least €53 million in the Republic of Ireland. For example, regional estimates of the value of pollinators to individual crops have also been assessed, with values of over £7 million per annum for apples in Northern Ireland and €3.9 million for oilseed in the Republic of Ireland.
- Biodiversity
- Education and Awareness
- Community Involvement

Summary

- 10 parishes in County Clare to participate in the 'Return to Nature' initiative
- Implement biodiversity measures to manage 30% of church grounds for biodiversity
- Work with Tidy Towns Initiatives and Local Interest Groups
- To deliver actions for the next Clare County Biodiversity Plan 2024-2030