

Ballinrobe Nature & Wildlife Plan 2014-2017



An Action of the County Mayo Heritage Plan 2011-2016



Acknowledgements

Many thanks to everyone in Ballinrobe who helped with the development of this plan. Special thanks to Tim O'Sullivan and Mary Jackson for helping to promote the biodiversity training, and the Tacú Family Resource Centre, Ballinrobe for the use of their venue. Thanks also to Deirdre Cunningham, Heritage Officer, Mayo County Council, for all her support and assistance with the project.

Text: Janice Fuller (www.janicefuller.ie)

Photos: Janice Fuller

Introduction

Ballinrobe is a vibrant market town in south Mayo's 'lake district'. It is situated just a few kilometres south of Lough Carra and east of Lough Mask. The River Robe is a focal point in the town and provides a beautiful natural amenity with 'The Bowers' riverside walk. The Robe flows into Lough Mask c. 4km north-west of the town. The town has a rich built heritage with several important historical buildings including the Augustinian Abbey, old RC Church, Cranmore House, Old Barracks, Old Mill and Gate Lodge.



The '*Ballinrobe Nature and Wildlife Plan 2014-2017*' is a community-based biodiversity plan that outlines projects, activities and events that will run in the Ballinrobe area over a three year period for the benefit of nature and wildlife, the environment, and the local community. This plan aims to raise awareness of, protect and enhance the rich natural heritage in the area.

Biodiversity training was provided for the community in Ballinrobe in order to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity and the many benefits of biodiversity for people, communities and the environment. Three biodiversity training sessions were held in Ballinrobe in early 2014 with a view to producing a local biodiversity plan for the area. The training and production of the plan was facilitated by a consultant ecologist but the projects in the plan were decided by the local community. This project is an action of the County Mayo Heritage Plan 2011- 2016.

Biodiversity simply refers to all living things (including plants, animals, microbes, fungi and people), the places where plants and animals etc. live (habitats), the interactions among living things (the web of life) and their environment (ecology). Biodiversity is the nature all around us, everywhere and in our everyday

life. Biodiversity is life and sustains life on Earth. Biodiversity provides us with clean air and water, food, fuel, building products and medicines. It also provides us with many free 'services' such as nutrient recycling, pollination and water filtration etc. Making space for nature in our towns and villages enhances and protects the local environment, and improves our quality of life by providing natural amenities for recreation (e.g. swimming, fishing, walking and relaxing).

Ballinrobe has many active community groups including those such as Tidy Towns that are working to protect and enhance wildlife and natural amenities in the town. Ballinrobe Community School and St. Josephs National School both have Green Flags. The 'Ballinrobe Nature and Wildlife Plan 2014-2017' is an opportunity to learn more about the rich natural heritage in the area, to protect and enhance this wonderful resource for the benefit of nature and wildlife, visitors to the area and the local community.



Nature and wildlife in Ballinrobe

The River Robe flows through Ballinrobe and enters Lough Mask a few kilometres to the west. The Bowers Walk along the river provides a wonderful opportunity to enjoy nature and wildlife along the river. There are a wide range of habitats along the walk and associated with the river including grassland, scrub, stone walls, hedgerow and mature trees, as well as the river itself and associated wetlands. A canal was constructed just to the west of the town to avoid rapids on the river. There are many mature trees, shrubs and hedgerows along the walk. Many different birds can be seen or heard including Grey Wagtail, Heron and Willow Warbler.

The Bulkaun River flows into the Robe in the town. It supports a population of particularly large Brown Trout that appear to stay in the Bulkaun throughout the year. Freshwater Crayfish, a protected species, is also found in the Bulkaun.

Within the town, the Green is a popular community green space with children's playground and playing fields. A Community Garden was developed by Tacú in the grounds of the Catholic Church. Community gardens provide a great opportunity to share knowledge and to enjoy gardening together. The Library grounds are also very attractive with mature trees. A bug hotel was developed by the scouts in the grounds.



The wider landscape around Ballinrobe is largely agricultural with grassland, hedgerows and dry stone walls. There are a few pockets of woodland and small wetlands. Both Lough Mask to the west and Lough Carra to the north are designated for nature conservation at Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas because of the important wetland habitats they contain, and bird populations that occur in

and around the lakes. Ballinrobe Golf Course also provides invaluable habitat for wildlife as it is an extensive area of parkland with trees and grassland.

Ballinrobe has a considerable built heritage with the Augustinian Abbey, old graveyards, the Library, Cranmore House etc. Old buildings, graveyards and stone structures are often refuges for wildlife as they can be relatively undisturbed and have been present for a long time. A heritage walk has been developed to highlight this wonderful heritage.



Ballinrobe Community Garden

Ballinrobe Nature and Wildlife Plan 2014-2017

	Project/ activity	Project leader (group or individual)	Project partners	Time frame
1	Provide information (signage/ leaflet/ phone app/ web page) highlighting natural heritage along The Bowers	Town Plan Team	Heritage Officer	2015
2	Promote and support nature and wildlife projects in schools	Schools, Tidy Towns, IWT	An Taisce, Mayo CoCo	Ongoing
3	Run nature walks and talks, e.g. angling, bats, trees, biodiversity of old buildings, wildlife-friendly gardening etc., during Heritage Week, Biodiversity Week and/or Tree Week.	Irish Wildlife Trust (Mayo)	Heritage Officer, BirdWatch Mayo	Annually
4	Continue to develop Community Garden	Tacú/ RSS	GIY Ireland	Ongoing
5	Develop and promote local walking routes rich in natural heritage e.g. Bog Road/ along Bulcaun River / Old Railway	Tacú, Town Management Team	Walking Officer	2015
6	Conduct tree survey in town and develop tree trail; Plant trees in school grounds; Develop tree maintenance programme for trees in town	Schools, Town Management Team	Heritage Officer	2015
7	Run Annual Spring Clean	Tidy Towns	An Taisce, Mayo CoCo	Annually
8	Promote wildlife-friendly gardening- include a wildlife-friendly category in the Best Kept Estates competition	Tidy Towns/ Residents associations	Mayo CoCo	2015-2016
9	Run Common Swift nesting project	IWT, Tidy Towns	GMIT, Linda Huxley	2015
10	Collate and continue to compile existing and new biodiversity information for Ballinrobe and environs	Tidy Towns	GMIT, Heritage Officer	Annually

IWT = Irish Wildlife Trust, Mayo Branch, Mayo CoCo = Mayo County Council, GMIT = Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Castlebar

Ensuring success

The successful implementation of a local biodiversity plan requires commitment from the community to support the projects, activities and/or events outlined in the plan. Ideally a local group should be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the 'Ballinrobe Nature and Wildlife Plan 2014-2017'. They should meet at least twice a year in order to set annual goals and to review progress to date. The Mayo County Heritage Officer will be available to support the local community implement their plan.

Resources for implementing the plan

	Project/ activity/ event	Resources
1	Natural heritage information for The Bowers walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heritage Officer www.roscommoncoco.ie/en/Services/Heritage/Publications/Telling_People_About_Our_Heritage-Interpretation_and_Signage_Guidance.pdf http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Irish_Walled_Towns/Bored_of_Boards__lowres_.pdf
2	Promote schools biodiversity projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> www.greenschoolsireland.org/themes/biodiversity.198.html www.rte.ie/radio/mooneygoeswild/factsheets/naturegarden/
3	Run nature walks and talks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heritage Officer
4	Develop Community Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> www.giyinternational.org/pages/giy_community_garden_initiative http://greensideup.ie/community-gardens-2/ http://www.bordbia.ie/aboutgardening/GardeningArticles/ScientificArticles/The_Benefits_of_Community_Gardens.pdf www.tacufrc.ie
5	Develop and promote local walking routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mayo County Council Walking Officer: www.mayowalks.ie/WalkingTrails/ http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Publications/Trail_Development/Guide_to_Planning_and_Developing_Recreational_Trails_in_Ireland.pdf www.noticenature.ie/Walking_Trails_in_Ireland.html
6	Conduct tree survey and develop tree trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heritage Officer
7	Run Annual Spring Clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> www.antaisce.org www.mayococo.ie
8	Promote wildlife-friendly gardening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> https://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/gardening/wildlife-friendly_garden.aspx http://www.ulsterwildlife.org/wildlife-gardening
9	Run Common Swift nesting project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> http://www.birdwatchmayo.org/birds/facts/Swifts/SwiftsCastlebar_Westport_2012.pdf

Potential funding sources

Fund/ Funding Body	Description
Leader	Leader full and part funding for a variety of community-led projects. Discuss potential projects with the Community Development Workers prior to submitting applications to determine if they meet the Leader Programmes criteria for projects.
The Heritage Council	The Heritage Council offer grants to community groups and individuals for heritage projects. See their website for details of the grant application criteria and application process (www.heritagecouncil.ie)
Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund, Mayo County Council	This fund is administered by the Environment Section of Mayo County Council; it promotes sustainable development by assisting small scale, non-profit environmental projects at a local level. Application forms and further information are available online at www.mayococo.ie (Environment Forms Page) or telephone Sharon Cameron, Environment Awareness Officer, Mayo County Council, Aras an Chontae, Castlebar, Co. Mayo, on 094 9047360 or email – environment@mayococo.ie
Environment Fund for Biodiversity Awareness Grant Scheme 2013	This grant was offered in 2013. The main aim of the grant is to raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. It is administered through the Biodiversity Policy Unit of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. For more information contact: biodiversitypolicy@ahg.gov.ie
Foras na Gaeilge	Foras na Gaeilge provides grants for signage and booklets etc. that include use of the Irish language
Mayo County Council	Funding for Heritage Week events; contact Deirdre Cunningham, Heritage Officer dcunningham@mayococo.ie , 094 9047684

Useful contacts and websites

Name (Group/ Individual)	Activities/ Expertise	Contact details
Deirdre Cunningham, Heritage Officer, Mayo County Council	All matters relating to heritage	dcunningham@mayococo.ie Tel: 094 9047684 www.mayococo.ie/heritage
National Parks and Wildlife Service	Responsible for the protection of Ireland's natural heritage, particularly sites designated as Special Conservation Areas, Special Protection Areas, Natural Heritage Areas, and Nature Reserves etc., and species of conservation concern e.g. hen harriers.	District Conservation Officer (098)49996
Vincent Wildlife Trust	Promote conservation of bats and other mammals; provide information and advice; organise walks and talks on bats	katemcaney@vwt.org.uk www.mammals-in-ireland.ie/
BirdWatch Ireland, Mayo Branch	Promote conservation of birds and their habitats; conduct surveys and organise birdwatching events in Mayo	www.birdwatchmayo.org/ birdwatchmayo@yahoo.com
Irish Wildlife Trust (IWT), Mayo Branch	IWT is a conservation charity committed to raising awareness of Ireland's natural heritage and protecting it for future generations.	Contact Seán Murphy at IWTmayo@gmail.com
Mayo Naturalists' Field Club	The aim of the Field Club is to promote an interest in all aspects of natural heritage.	www.mayococo.ie/en/Services/Heritage/MayoNaturalistsFieldClub/

Appendix 1: List of participants

	Name
1	Michael Sweeney
2	Tom Tiernan
3	Paula Murphy
4	Niamh Coyne
5	Seán Murphy
6	Tim O’Sullivan
7	James Morley
8	Niamh ní Mhaoilealla
9	Manan Shendan
10	Ann Walsh
11	Peter Heaps
12	Michelle Walsh
13	Aoife Donnelly
14	Marion Shaughnessy
15	Peter O’Toole