

Wicklow Mountain Views



A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

THE NEWSLETTER OF
WICKLOW UPLANDS COUNCIL

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It has been clear for some time now that the main national and international focus in the coming years will be on Climate Change and Biodiversity. There is no way to escape that even if we wanted to. While this will involve difficulties for all of us, it will also present many opportunities. The Wicklow and Dublin uplands still have many problems that need care and attention. Wicklow Uplands Council, with its bottom-up approach and its ethos of partnership, co-operation and communications, is ideally placed to make a substantial contribution to the vast amount of work involved.

The uplands landscape as we see it now has changed dramatically over the centuries. The ice age has come and gone. Great forests have appeared and disappeared. The blanket bog has developed over vast periods at the rate of about one millimetre per annum. The old engravings of romantic Wicklow scenes show an almost complete absence of trees except around big houses. What we see now is largely created by human action. And the question arises - what do we want to see in the centuries to come. Is there a plan of what we want the Wicklow and Dublin uplands to be like at the end of the present century? What we need is an overall coherent and achievable vision to ensure we are all working towards the same goals.

And we all have a big part to play. The farming and land-owning community is absolutely central to the creation of a sustainable environment. The farm will produce the high-quality food we live on. The farm will also nurse the natural heritage back to a level that will be with us for centuries to come. The SUAS Project Report, which has now been published,

shows the scale of the necessary work but also makes a substantial contribution to our knowledge of how uplands agriculture might develop from now on. The patient is ill. Unless the farmers and landowners are fully behind the recovery, it is very unlikely to be successful. And the doctor must be paid a proper fee.

The Uplands Paths Survey Report forms an excellent basis for future work on informal upland paths and tracks. We are close to areas with very high populations. There is a growing emphasis on outdoor activity and a healthy lifestyle. Very large numbers of people visit the uplands every week. They are going to keep coming and most likely in increasing numbers. If the appropriate facilities are not available in the appropriate places, there is likely to be great damage to the sensitive environment of the uplands.

Work has continued throughout the year on Trails Development, including work to link the Sugarloaf Trail with the Varty Trails. Brian Dunne and myself visited Westport last year to see the work that has been done on the greatly eroded paths on Croagh Patrick mountain. The results are excellent and show what can be achieved by taking a fresh approach to path construction and repair. It is great to see that Wicklow County Council are planning the repair on a similarly iconic peak - the Great Sugarloaf.

The high level of deer is an increasing problem throughout the uplands. It is good to see the Irish Deer Management Strategy Group Report was published in December 2023. Action is urgently needed. And the problems with dog control have not gone away. Uncontrolled dogs are of increasing concern for the farming community in the first place because of continuing attacks on sheep and livestock. The number of dogs seems to be increasing year on year. And dogs do also attack people. Wicklow Uplands Council held a seminar on the problem in March which brought the many

interest groups together to see if a long-term solution can be found.

It has been particularly good to be involved with the new test project for peatland restoration lead by the National Park. A huge amount of work is required in this area. Then there is the problem with invasive species and many other problems that need attention. So no shortage of work for the foreseeable future.

Our biggest single worry is still core funding. We are extremely grateful to the Heritage Council and to Wicklow County Council for their continued support and more recently to LAWPRO. We undertake a large amount of work with very limited resources. So stable funding, ideally on a multi-year basis, is essential for the success of our efforts.

Our Coordinator Brian Dunne has left us to work with the Department of Agriculture's ACRES programme. We owe a big debt of gratitude to Brian for his excellent work over the years. We wish him every success in his new role. Lorna Kelly took over as Coordinator last September. Lorna has wide knowledge and experience of working with community based organisations and the uplands and we are delighted to have her on board.

Thanks to Ian Davis and his staff in the PURE project for their continued sterling work. And special congratulations to Denis Halpin and his team in Hollywood on their village winning the All-Ireland Pride of Place award.

Finally, a big thank you to Lorna and Máire Dewar, to the Board and to our supporters throughout the uplands. We live in interesting times.

Louis O'Byrne

Chair, Wicklow Uplands Council



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Wicklow Mountains National Park – Peatland Restoration and Sheep Fleece

Hugh McLindon District Conservation Officer, NPWS



Sheep fleece being used instead of imported coconut coir roll as drain blocking material in peatland restoration work

The Wicklow Mountains is covered by an extensive array of peatland habitats. Much of it has been damaged and degraded over the years. In order to reverse or even slow some of the declines in habitat quality, it is necessary to carry out restoration projects at many locations and using a wide range of techniques. The required works can be simply categorised: erosion prevention and vegetation management.

The benefits of peatland restoration to us all are widely known, and it has been shown that protection of an existing peatland system is one of THE most effective ways to combat climate change and reduce carbon emissions. Studies have also shown that it is more cost-effective to restore or protect wetlands within a watershed, than to deal with the consequences of excess sedimentation or flooding downstream. Biodiversity will reduce or increase, depending on the quality of the habitat, so it just makes sense for so many reasons to protect, enhance or restore valuable bogland habitats such as those found in the Wicklow Mountains.

From 2018 through to 2022, the Sustainable Uplands Agri-Environmental Scheme (SUAS Project - Wicklow Uplands) had the tremendous benefit of facilitating collaboration between farmers, farm advisors, ecologists, local authorities and NPWS staff in peatland restoration.

Currently the NPWS have a number of peatland restoration projects ongoing.

These involve trying to re-wet or re-vegetate degraded sites. On Barnacullian ridge for instance, there is a very large area of brown peat completely without any heather or grass cover. Beside it where the peat has been washed or blown away all that's left is bare rock. In time if restoration works aren't carried out, all of the bare peat will erode leaving us with a degraded landscape almost devoid of biodiversity.

Our aim is simple - reduce the grazing pressure, re-seed heather and grasses, protect the bare peat from the elements, slow the water as it runs across the site by blocking gullies and monitor to ensure success. If resources allow, scale the action up to tackle more and more degraded sites.



Sheep fleece being used instead of imported coconut coir roll as drain blocking material in peatland restoration work

It would be better if we have the expertise or materials available locally, particularly to cut down on carbon emissions and to spend our funds locally and boost the economy. It has been well demonstrated that money spent locally has a knock-on effect compared to money spent abroad (Local Multiplier Effect - spending locally is worth almost 400 % more to the local economy)

Specifically, one aspect of the Blanket bog restoration projects that could take this into account includes the use of Coir rolls (coconut husk sediment traps). Currently, the NPWS is purchasing these Coir rolls from a company in the UK. They have reduced their carbon footprint by importing the coir and manufacturing the rolls in the UK. Working with local farmers, we have explored the possibility of replacing coir completely with sheep fleece. The Ulster Wildlife Trust have demonstrated this in Cuilcagh, Co. Fermanagh (How peatland restoration at Cuilcagh is helping to tackle climate change | Ulster Wildlife). The conservation team removed the coir from the biodegradable netting and replaced it with sheep's fleece by hand. They then monitored the effectiveness of the sheep fleece roll in close proximity to coir rolls, and were able to conclude that they are entirely effective and also have no negative effects.

Within Wicklow, approx. 40 linear metres of Sheep Fleece roll have been installed at two restoration sites. These have been in place for 6 months and are functioning really well - they are effective at slowing the flow of water and trapping peat sediment (see images). This bodes well for the future use of the Sheep Fleece roll as a replacement for the Coir logs.

Irish Deer: Resource or Pest?



David Tompkins (Wild Irish Game) Simone Ciuti and Colin Brock (UCD) at Ooh Deer! Event, May 2024

In Ireland, opinions about deer are divided. For some, deer are a valuable resource, while others see them as a pest. Despite these differing viewpoints, both sides share a common goal: maintaining healthy deer populations at sustainable levels to ensure human-deer coexistence and future viable populations. This was the key message from Simone Ciuti, Associate Professor of Wildlife Biology at UCD, during his presentation at the “OOO! Deer... Research in Ireland and Their Impact on Biodiversity” event held at the Brockagh Centre on May 22, 2024.

Deer often have a bad reputation in the Uplands, mainly due to their overabundance and their negative effects

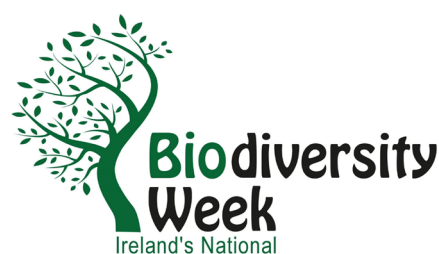
County Council Environment & Climate Action Team to host this event during Biodiversity Week.

The event aimed to explore deer research in Ireland and their impact on biodiversity. Simone Ciuti and Colin Brock [M.Sc., researcher] from the School of Wildlife Biology at University College Dublin, presented their findings. They discussed the differences between balanced and unbalanced environments and the implications for deer populations, densities, and ecosystems. Simone emphasized the role of deer as ecosystem “engineers” and discussed the SMARTDEER project (2020-2022), with focus on forestry, bovine tuberculosis

(bTB), and deer management. Colin’s work on the “BioDEERiversity” project examines how deer at varying densities affect biodiversity, including mammal and bird diversity, understory vegetation, microbial composition, and soil chemistry across 50 sites in Wicklow and NE Carlow.

Before the formal presentations, attendees enjoyed a “venison feast” prepared by the Brockagh Resource Centre team. The meal included venison sausage soup with Mediterranean vegetables, followed by warm ciabatta filled with seasonal salad and roasted rump of venison! This provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the topics while enjoying quality venison. David Tompkins, General Manager of Wild Irish Game, spoke about the quality of venison products, the processing methods, and the market for venison; which linked his talk to that key message highlighted in Simone’s closing slide.

The event underscored the importance of proper and transparent national coordination in managing deer populations to balance ecological health and human interests.



Group enjoying ‘venison feast’ at Wicklow Uplands Council Deer Event at the Brockagh Resource Centre.

on the environment and agriculture. Overpopulation of deer can hinder the regeneration of native woodlands, contribute to overgrazing, and damage field boundaries and agricultural land. These issues were highlighted in the 2023 report by the Irish Deer Management Strategy Group, which prompted the Wicklow Uplands Council and Wicklow



Simone Ciuti, Assistant Professor School of Wildlife Biology, UCD making presentation at Wicklow Uplands Council Deer Event.

The Nature Restoration law can bring benefits to everyone

By Paddy Woodworth

"There was something about this restoration project your ecologists didn't tell me," a cereal farmer told me 10 years ago, surveying the swathes of wildflowers and grasses surrounding his maturing barley crop. He had agreed to set aside a metre of headland around his fields while ploughing, to provide breeding space for the restoration of the farm's long-lost partridge population.

Familiar as I was with the scepticism many farmers feel about restoration and conservation measures, I expected that he was about to tell me of some unforeseen negative outcome of the project.

I couldn't have been more wrong. The restoration scheme was based not only on creating nesting cover for partridges, but also for restoring habitat for the grassland insect species with which they feed their chicks. (Yes, adult partridges are mostly vegetarian, but their chicks need meat protein during their growth stage).

So what had the ecologists not told him, I asked in some trepidation? "They didn't realise," the farmer said, "that among those insects are several predators that eat aphids. And aphids can destroy up to half my annual yield of barley. I'm finding much higher yields since we let the edges go to wildflowers, despite the marginal loss of not ploughing right up to the hedgerows."

This farmer had found an unexpected but significant economic benefit, on top of the modest headland compensation the project paid him. Restoring nature is not the enemy of profitable farming. Done properly, it can and should be a friendly ally of productive, sustainable agriculture.

This man was no romantic, he was a hard-nosed, bottom-line businessman, but that is not all he was. He added that he found his working days enhanced by the wildflowers. "Spending days among hedge to hedge barley gets boring, even lonely" he said. "The flowers add a splash of colour and company to our lives".

As for the partridges, the sound of their calls and occasional sightings brought back childhood memories of their presence on his father's farm, where more traditional farming methods had once left space for them. "I hope they will be numerous enough someday in the future that my grandchildren can hunt them, if they wish," he added. "It would be nice to have our own partridge supper."

So, restoration does not only bring material rewards, but cultural and well-being benefits as well.

The strange thing about the very strong passions evoked by the EU's Nature Restoration Law, which barely squeaked past the European Council (June), is that most of its opponents, at least in Ireland, agree that our landscapes need to be restored. Irish farmers' organisations, and some independent TDs and MEPs, who wanted the law rejected, have generally been at pains to stress that they accept that we need to address the biodiversity crisis. They claim that the new law asks too

much, too fast, of the farming and general rural sectors.

Some of their counterparts in Europe were not so rational, with far-right parties spreading blatant untruths about the law, claiming that villages will disappear, and an 'abandoned' countryside depopulated if the law is implemented. Unforgivably, many mainstream European conservatives amplified this fake news, for fear of being outflanked on the right, as they were anyway, in the recent elections to the EU parliament. Irish centre-right politicians in Fianna Fail and Fine Gael were an honourable exception – they supported the law, albeit in a considerably diluted form.

There are grounds for a little optimism that the law could be successfully implemented here; for this to happen it is vital that rural communities are brought fully into the process, and treated as the major stakeholders that they are. The mantra adopted by An Garda during the pandemic could be usefully adapted here: Engage, Listen, Inform – and only Enforce as a last resort.

The EU's environmental directives to date, especially the Habitats and Birds Directives, have been experienced by many landowners and rural communities as a crude and unwelcome imposition from Brussels via Dublin, without any local consultation. National Parks and Wildlife Service staff have not been given either the resources or the training to communicate the rationale and community benefits of these measures to the public.

Worse, the NPWS senior management (to the frustration of the service's many dedicated and hard-working staff) has often shamefully failed to implement these very same measures on the public land they directly or indirectly control. Rhododendron, deer and wildfires have almost fatally compromised Killarney National Park's finest oakwoods. Special Areas of Conservation have been drawn on maps without consultation, and, bizarrely, mostly still lack any coherent conservation planning.



Paddy Woodworth is the author of "Our Once and Future Planet: Restoring the World in the Climate Change Century". He lived between Bray and the Sugarloaf growing up, and now spends most of his time in Glenmalur.

In fact, some of the most positive restoration initiatives have come from farmers themselves. The admirable Burren programme has long set an example that the Department of Agriculture has been all too reluctant to copy. (The ACRES scheme that Pippa Hackett claims extends its benefits has been shorn of the Burren initiative's best biodiversity features by blinkered vested interests and Civil Service mandarins, with her acquiescence.)

But the Burren Projects offshoot, the Hare's Corner, has been embraced by many individual farmers across the country, providing patchworks (and hopefully, ultimately corridors) of semi-natural space that enable insects, birds, and animals to survive the biological deserts of industrialised agriculture. The uplands, where agriculture has not been industrialised, are ideal for such 'corners' to flourish.

But to flourish they need to be managed, farmers who manage them must be adequately rewarded financially. They will, of course, ultimately be rewarded by the

recovery of their land, often compromised by overgrazing, and reinvigorated by the return of natural processes.

Farmers do have legitimate fears about bigger restoration projects. Might rewetting on an adjacent site by Bord na Móna, for example, spill over onto their fields? Such fears must be addressed in person, and on-site. Every restoration project is case-specific, every restoration project is a large-scale experiment, while restoration science is getting better, not all of them will work. There must be proper compensation when they don't.

The first step in making the Nature Restoration Law work to everyone's benefit is to have informed discussions on what restoration means, how it works, and what its benefits are, in every rural community in the country. We are lucky in Wicklow to have a number of very promising restoration schemes already in progress, from innovative individual farms in the Wildlands Network, to projects led by local NPWS with support from Rewild Wicklow (great work, unhelpful name, in my view) volunteers, to very large-scale

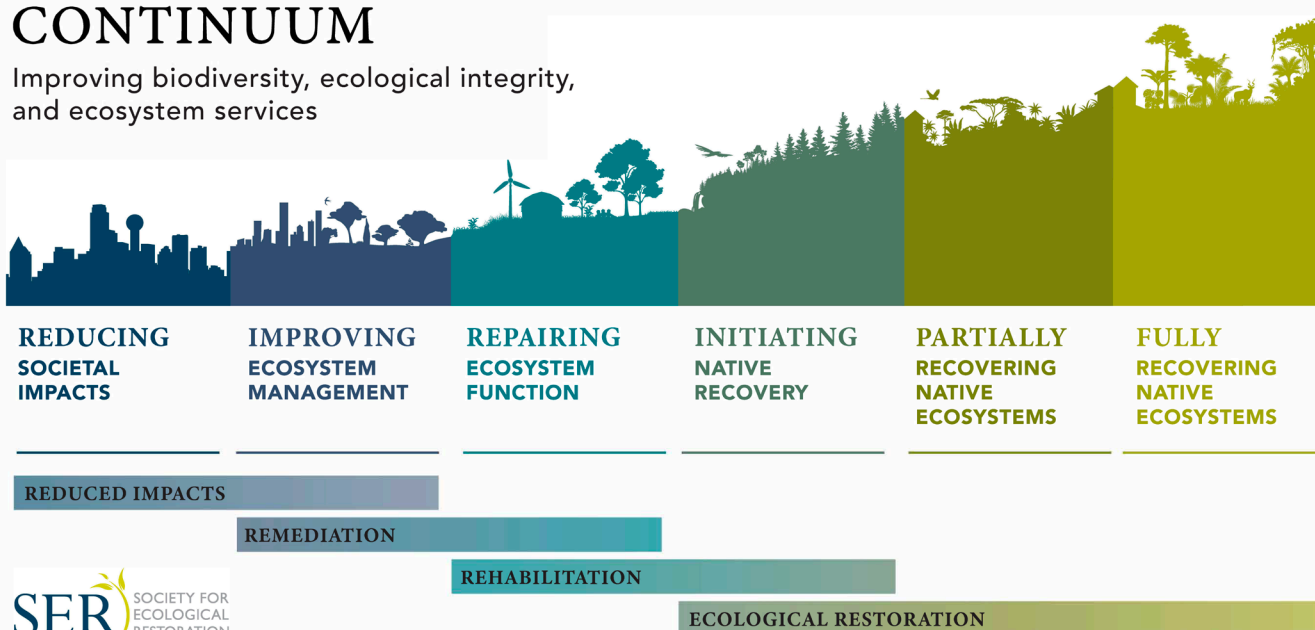
ones like the work under way at Luggala.

If you want to explore ideas about restoration, a good place to start is the set of International Standards and Principles developed by the Society for Ecological Restoration over many years. Significantly, the first principle is engagement with stakeholders. And, as the accompanying graphic shows, there are many levels to which a restoration project can aspire, ranging from simply curtailing a particular source of damage or pollution to the full-scale recovery of a native ecosystem. This is not a one-size-fits-all practice, but every level provides benefits, from flood mitigation to pollination, from carbon sequestration to enhanced eco-tourism.

We all know how degraded our landscapes are, how fast climate is changing, and how many valuable species we are losing. Farmers are at the sharp end of this crisis, but only if their experience and views are treated with respect will the great opportunities that the Nature Restoration Law offers be delivered.

THE RESTORATIVE CONTINUUM

Improving biodiversity, ecological integrity, and ecosystem services



UNDERSTANDING; Dog Ownership, Management and Control

In March, Wicklow Uplands Council hosted an event at The Gap in Glencullen, Co Dublin, titled "Understanding: Dog Ownership, Management and Control." The event aimed to address long-standing issues related to dogs in the uplands and their impact on recreational users, livestock, and nature.

The challenge of unmanaged and uncontrolled dogs in the Uplands is not a new one. Every year, Wicklow Uplands Council works to raise awareness about the vulnerabilities of sheep and other livestock to dog disturbances, worrying, and attacks. However, this event stood out due to its innovative approach. Held outdoors amidst the scenic beauty of the uplands, it welcomed dogs, making it an inclusive and practical session for all attendees. The event featured presentations from a diverse group of experts and stakeholders. Each presenter used the dynamic 'Pecha Kucha' format, presenting 20 slides for 20 seconds each, ensuring concise and engaging talks [Pecha Kucha comes from the Japanese meaning 'Chit Chat'].



Representatives from the Department of Rural and Community Development spoke about their new public awareness campaign, which features strong radio advertisements emphasising the responsibilities of dog owners. The campaign highlights legal responsibilities, such as having your dog microchipped, maintaining a valid dog licence, ensuring the dog wears a collar with contact details, and keeping all dogs under effective control [in both urban and rural public spaces]. Janic Shulte, Education Guide from Knocksink Nature Reserve, Enniskerry took a moment to outline the significant impacts dogs can have on the natural environment. Their presence can disturb nesting and resting birds, leading to stress and displacement of wildlife. Additionally, dog faeces, and bags of faeces left behind, can pollute the environment, harm vegetation, and pose health risks. Wicklow IFA Chairman Tom Byrne shared real images of the severe consequence of livestock attacks by dogs, he included stress, injury and death to animals, financial losses for farmers due to killed or injured livestock, and strained relationships between dog

owners and rural communities. Kelly Hegarty who works closely with dog owners and is an active dog walker noted that other recreational users may feel uneasy or unsafe around uncontrolled dogs, which can diminish the outdoor experience for all. Her work exemplifies how engagement and communication with dog owners can ensure good understanding of dog behaviour, which supports good management and full control. The ISPCA representative glued the various presentations together reminding everyone of animal welfare, reiterating the need for strong education required within the public domain on responsible pet ownership which ultimately protects vulnerable animals, and stressing the need for enforcement of legislation.

A key component of the event was the workshop that followed the presentations. Participants broke into small groups to discuss specific questions surrounding dog control in the uplands. Topics included relevant legislation, challenges in keeping dogs under control, and potential actions to promote responsible dog ownership. The presence of the various experts enriched the discussions with a wealth of knowledge and diverse perspectives.

The event concluded with a collaborative session where participants brainstormed actions to promote responsible dog ownership and control. Ideas included increased public awareness, community workshops, and enhanced collaboration between dog owners, farmers, and wildlife experts. A clear and unified message delivery was seen as essential.

Wicklow Uplands Council is using this event as a foundation for preparing a position paper. For now, dog owners are encouraged to leave their pets at home when going to the Uplands. Promoting responsible dog ownership helps protect livestock, wildlife and ensures a pleasant experience for everyone.



Group discussion at Understanding Dog Ownership, Management and Control Event at The Gap, Glencullen

Scottish Crofters Field Visit to the Wicklow Uplands

Study tours and field visits are important networking events. They afford opportunities to see and experience first-hand issues faced by different communities, complications and obstacles, projects undertaken and solutions devised.

Wicklow Uplands Council made an informal presentation over tea, soup and sandwiches to a group of Scottish 'Crofters' as part of a field study visit they undertook to the Wicklow Uplands through Scotland's Rural Colleges SAC Consulting and Teagasc. Crofting is a practice and system of land tenure and small-scale food production distinctive to the Scottish Highlands. The group visited a number of sites across the mountains looking at work undertaken on heather management, gully tree planting, and more before being welcomed to Wicklow Uplands Council office.

During this informal hosting at the Office of Wicklow Uplands Council the consensus and partnership model was delved into, exemplified through projects initiated or administered by Wicklow Uplands Council including the 2022 Uplands Path Condition Survey work, 18+ year PURE Project, Wicklow Deer Management Units and the SUAS European Innovation Project. Conversation was held on the critical aspects of dog management and control in the uplands, increased recreational and visitor pressures, protected areas & designations and farming and landowning experiences.

The importance of the funding Wicklow Uplands Council receives through the Heritage Council, LAWPRO and Wicklow County Council and private donations was stressed. The valuable work to support Wicklow Uplands Council mission could not be delivered without such support. The study group were unaware of any existing organisation in the Scottish Highlands and Islands that takes such a bottom up approach to sustainable use of their upland environment for those living, working or recreating. Maybe Wicklow Uplands Council is a model to be replicated further afield.



Group of Scottish Crofters enjoying conversation and lunch time hospitality at Wicklow Uplands Council Office.

Hollywood – Get the Gold

Hollywood was nominated by Wicklow County Council for the Pride of Place National competition held in 2023. The nomination recognised the community's efforts to enhance the village, preserve its heritage, traditions, culture, and connection with groups and communities outside Hollywood. The adjudicators were impressed by the comprehensive planning aimed at future-proofing Hollywood.

It was not the first time Hollywood was nominated. In 2014, the County Council entered the Hollywood Fair which received the Silver Award as runners-up. In an effort to succeed this time, the Hollywood Forum, Tidy Towns, ICA, and the Community Hall spared no effort. Together, they showcased Hollywood to the adjudicators, emphasising unique skills and connections. 28 community groups, including 8 local crafters, were prepared to demonstrate their contributions, accomplishments, and future goals within Hollywood.

The Community Hall was full to the rafters on adjudication day, Council officials, dignitaries and locals were amazed at the notice boards, crafts, cheese and honey producers. It's only when a community comes together one realises what is there within. After the adjudication tea and cakes were served.

Wicklow Uplands Council played a significant role by showcasing its connections to Hollywood, such as St. Kevin's Way Development group, The Pure Mile, and SUAS program, as well as hosting meetings in the Community Hall. The adjudicators were particularly impressed with Wicklow Uplands Council's commitment to biodiversity and the sustainability of the hills, in addition to their outreach to community groups like the Hollywood Forum, offering support and advice on their projects.

The Hollywood Community Forum expressed pride in its membership in the Wicklow Uplands Council and the strong relationship built with its staff and members over the years. Notably, two members from the Forum serve on the Uplands Council.

In a delightful turn of events, Hollywood won the Gold Award in the Pride of Place National All Ireland Competition 2023.



Hollywood Pride of Place Winners at Wicklow County Council Chambers.

- Ann Halpin, Hollywood Forum

Protecting our upland streams and rivers: A role for citizen science

What is citizen science?

Citizen science was first defined back in the 1990s as a “research technique on which non-scientists voluntarily contribute scientific data to a project”. The term appeared in the Oxford English dictionary in 2014 with the following definition “citizen science involves members of the public in the collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world, typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists”. There is therefore a tendency to think of involvement of the public in data collection as a recent phenomenon especially with the rise in citizen science projects in recent decades. However, amateur scientists have studied the natural world and collected and documented important events for hundreds of years prior to the professionalisation of science in the late 19th century. Many of these amateurs are considered to have made contributions to knowledge indistinguishable from professional scientists.

The relatively recent upsurge in the number of citizen projects across the world is probably due to a combination of increasing pressures on the natural environment and a need for more data, growing public awareness together with data handling, access and visibility of benefits offered by the internet and the use of smart phone apps.

The involvement of citizen science in water quality monitoring is well established in many countries especially in Europe and North America, and is now gaining increased interest and activity in Ireland, including here in Co. Wicklow.



Citizen science is most effective when it is generating data that are needed.

There are almost 64,000 km of small headwater streams in Ireland, that is 75% of the total river channel length. This extensive channel length, particularly in remote upland areas such as the Wicklow Mountains, makes it practically

Typical small stream in the Wicklow uplands.

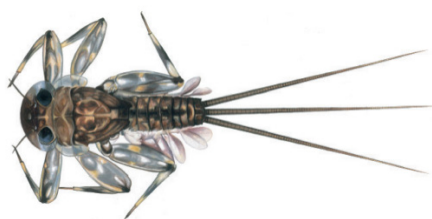
impossible for regulatory authorities and research bodies to widely monitor stream water quality. At the same time small stream are the most vulnerable part of the river network and exert a strong influence on water quality further downstream. Although many of these streams are not much more than a metre wide, they provide many important benefits. Described as the ‘capillaries of

the landscape’s vascular system’, small streams collect and distribute water and various other materials to the lower reaches of the river network. A number of fish species can be found in small streams, but they are best known for the important spawning habitat they provide for brown trout. Juvenile trout can spend several years in these streams before migrating downstream where they

become the catchable fish that support angling. Furthermore, many invertebrate species are unique to headwaters while others are common to reaches further downstream, and these headwaters are therefore important sources of species to repopulate downstream reaches that have been impacted by pollution or habitat degradation.

What types of data can citizen science collect?

Some citizen science projects collect water chemistry data but the most informative data are based on the invertebrates living in the stream as they provide a measure of prevailing stream water quality. Those visible to the naked eye are known as macroinvertebrates. Some are sensitive to pollution such as the flat-bodied mayfly nymphs while others are more tolerant. Thus, the combination of species found is used to gauge water quality.



Flat-bodied mayfly nymph found only in clean streams. Drawing by Aoife Quinn



Some of the other key water quality macroinvertebrate indicators. From above: stonefly nymph, caddisfly larva, cased caddisfly larva. Drawings by Aoife Quinn



This is what a stream sample looks like when many species have been eliminated by pollution. Note there are no mayfly, stonefly or caddisfly larva present.

Citizen science river monitoring in the Wicklow uplands

Apart from the citizen science training for the East Wicklow Rivers Trust, citizens from Laragh/Glendalough and west Wicklow (River Detectives) have been undergoing training in macroinvertebrate identification over the past year. They have been introduced to two citizen science schemes; the citizen science stream index (CSSI) and the small stream impact score (SSIS). CSSI is based on just six indicators whereas the SSIS has a larger number of indicators and is therefore more informative, not only in getting an

indication of water quality but it also gives some measure of macroinvertebrate biodiversity.

In collaboration with LAWPRO and National Parks & Wildlife Service the River Detectives will identify sites for sampling over the spring and summer months. The data collected will be provided to LAWPRO, NPWS and the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

In addition to general water quality assessment the River Detectives will also record the occurrence of a mayfly species, *Ameletus inopinatus*, that is unique to the uplands. This species is an Arctic-Alpine relict from the ice age and lives in cool waters typically below 10°C. It is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate warming which is why we need a good baseline of its current distribution. It will also serve as an indicator of potential climate change impacts on the uplands.

Citizen scientists can make a significant contribution to filling data gaps on the health of the Wicklow upland streams and to generate awareness of these streams as living systems that are easily degraded. However, the collection of data that is reliable and accurate is key to the value of the citizen science contribution. Volunteers who sign up for training will be given the skills and confidence to become citizen scientists.

For further information contact mary.kelly-quinn@ucd.ie





ACRES Leinster

ACRES Co-operation (ACRES CP) is a high ambition stream within the national agri-environment scheme operating from 2023 -2027. Participation in ACRES CP is available to farmers within eight targeted high priority geographic Co-operation Zones (CP Zones) across the country. These CP Zones were prioritized as areas of High Nature Value (HNV) farmland dominated by semi-natural habitats (both privately owned and commonage), Natura 2000 lands and priority water catchments with high water quality. Hence the CP Zones are largely associated with upland areas. The Wicklow & Dublin Uplands along with the Blackstairs, Slieve Blooms and Cooley Mountains form the ACRES Leinster CP Zone.

ACRES Leinster is managed by the Hen Harrier Programme with our local CP Team based in Blessington. The CP team implements the scheme at a local level and facilitates co-operation between farmers, advisors and state agencies. The Hen Harrier Programme also manages ACRES Munster South Connacht and ACRES Breifne, meaning that nationally it provides support for over 60% of farmers participating in ACRES CP.

How does the Scheme work?

ACRES CP is taking a hybrid results-based approach to support the delivery of ecological services by farmers within the CP Zone. This means that farmland is assessed or scored for ecological value with the aim of increasing that score over the lifetime of the scheme. There is a payment per hectare, or 'habitat payment', attached to the field score. Scores are on a scale of 0 to 10 with higher scores achieving higher payments per hectare. The habitat payment is capped at €7000 per year. This process provides an incentive to maintain or improve the score over the lifetime of the scheme as

the land will be scored at least three times over five years. Farmers who participated in the SUAS Project and other upland EIPs will be familiar with this concept, but it will be new to many.

ACRES CP farmers can also apply for actions to help them address issues and improve their field & commonage scores. There is an action budget allocation of a minimum €17500 per farmer over the course of the five years. Should a farmer not receive the full €7000 habitat payment in any year, then the shortfall goes into their action budget.



Scorecards

In 2023 all participating farmland within the CP Zone was walked and scored. Farm planners assessed privately owned fields and the CP Team assessed commonages. Each field & commonage was assigned an appropriate scorecard based on the predominant habitat type. The main scorecards used were grassland, peatland and scrub/woodland. Each of these assesses the ecological and hydrological integrity of the farmland along with any threats or pressures. The scorecards are designed to deliver for biodiversity, carbon sequestration, water quality, soil quality, flood & fire resilience.

Pressures we might see on commonages include self-sown conifers, as they have a drying effect on surrounding peatland; wildfire damage; peat erosion and illegal dumping.

While there have been delays in farmers receiving their 2023 baseline scores, that information is currently being communicated to them and this will enable them to decide on what actions they should carry to improve their scores.

NPIs and Landscape Actions

Actions designed to improve scores are available to farmers in each year of the scheme. These are split into two groups, Non-Productive Investments (NPIs) and Landscape Actions (LAs). NPIs are small standalone actions that farmers can carry out on their own private lands. There are a whole suite of these NPIs which farmers can apply for. Some of which will result in increased field scores, others will provide for wildlife and some infrastructure type support. Examples include planting trees, creation of small woodland, wild bird cover plots and strips, increased field margins, installation of barn owl boxes, kestrel boxes, swift boxes, stonewall



repair, installation of gates and fences etc.

To give an example, if a field received a reduced score because of livestock accessing a watercourse, then the farmer could apply for riparian margin fencing to exclude livestock. This resolves the issue so the score would reflect that upon reassessment. The farmer can also apply for a new water trough, solar pump or pasture pump to provide a drinking water supply to the field. There are a lot of options within the scheme to address various issues.

Farmers applied for NPIs at the end of last year and each was then screened

by the local CP team to ensure 'the right action in the right place'. That process is well completed and farmers are currently awaiting notification from the Department of Agriculture on whether their NPIs are approved or rejected. There will be another NPI window open later this year and farmers can apply for more actions. The availability of field scores this time round will really help to deliver more targeted actions.

The next step in the scheme is the delivery of Landscape Actions (LAs). These will be much larger actions at a landscape level. All actions on commonage will be LAs as they may require the involvement of multiple shareholders and will require specialist techniques. The use of drone surveying and remote sensing techniques helps to target landscape actions. Work is ongoing on the LAs and the list is expected to be published later this year. Examples include invasive species removal, peatland restoration techniques etc. It will be important that commonage shareholders work together to deliver some of these actions. The commonage groups formed under SUAS are a great example of what can be achieved through collaborative working.

Local Area Plan

It is worth mentioning that a Local Area Plan has been developed for each of the CP Zones which identifies the environmental challenges for the region along with high level objectives. This helps the local CP team ensure that actions are targeted and delivered. Specific objectives for the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands include:

- Water Quality
- Peatland
- Semi- natural grasslands
- Geese & Swans
- Raptors
- Barn Owl & Kestrel
- Archaeology

Full details of the scheme, available actions and the Local Action Plan are available on the **ACRES website** www.acresireland.ie or you can our follow ACRES Instagram page [@acresleinster](https://www.instagram.com/acresleinster).

Brian Dunne
Deputy Project Manager ACRES
Leinster

Pure Dedication



PURE (Protecting Uplands and Rural Environments) was a pioneering initiative launched in Ireland in 2006 to tackle illegal dumping in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands. This project exemplifies the partnership model advocated by the Wicklow Uplands Council, which takes pride in being involved. The partnership includes both statutory and non-statutory organisations and stakeholders, such as the Department of Environment, Climate, and Communications, Wicklow County Council, South Dublin County Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Coillte, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Wicklow Uplands Council, with strong community involvement.

The PURE team is led by Ian Davis [Project Manager] who has been with the project since its inception. Ian oversees project management and supports the strategic development of PURE. He and his team, Mick and Alana, have consistently delivered with enthusiasm and expertise. Typically, Ian would prepare media and articles such as this but this time, Wicklow Uplands Council wants to acknowledge the team's unwavering dedication and hard work. This recognition coincides with the introduction of the new PURE truck in March of this year and the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the PURE Mile initiative.

PURE employs a multi-disciplinary approach to combat and reduce illegal dumping. This includes educational programs, environmental and community projects, regional and national media campaigns, digital marketing, public



New dedicated PURE Truck, launched and operational March 2024.

awareness campaigns, and enforcement and preventative measures. The public is encouraged to report illegal dumping incidents to the PURE call-line at 1800 365 123. A dedicated vehicle, the PURE truck, then removes the rubbish from the uplands, with all collections recorded on a GPS/GIS database system. Since 2006, 3,950,000 kilograms of rubbish have been removed from over 14,800 illegal dumping sites in the Wicklow and Dublin uplands, and the project has processed over 15,900 reports and complaints.

The Wicklow and Dublin uplands are unique landscapes, many of which are designated protected areas under the European Habitats and Birds Directives, including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Many upland lakes, rivers, and streams are 'high status' waterbodies under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Maintaining a pristine landscape so that these areas can thrive is of national importance.

While PURE has removed tonnes of illegally dumped material from this precious landscape, it only has one truck and one driver, which limits its ability to remove smaller litter items (such as cans, bottles, cups, wrappers, and plastics) from roadsides, pull-ins, and viewing points.

The PURE Mile, an environmental, community, and heritage initiative, encourages communities and groups in rural areas of Wicklow, South Dublin, and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown to adopt a mile or more of road. These groups organise litter picks and clean-ups, working together to keep their areas litter-free. The PURE Mile fosters a sense of place and community collaboration. Due to the enthusiasm and commitment of PURE Mile groups, there has been a noticeable decrease in litter and rubbish in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands. The initiative has grown annually from 5 miles (8 kilometers) in 2010 to over 950 miles (1,529 kilometers) in 2023. In 2023 alone, approximately 5,000 bags of rubbish were collected from over 2,000 litter picks. People are now more aware of the negative impact of litter and rubbish on the natural environment, especially in rural and upland landscapes.

All groups registered with the PURE Mile are invited to the PURE Mile Awards Night, an energetic evening celebrating camaraderie and community engagement. If you're not already participating in the PURE Mile initiative but are interested, contact PURE at info@pureproject.ie, download an application form at www.pureproject.ie/what-we-do/the-pure-mile, or call PURE at 0402 28662. More information about PURE is available at www.pureproject.ie.

On behalf of all those who live, work, and recreate in our uplands, thank you to the PURE Team and PURE Mile Volunteers. Your work is recognised and valued.



Glendalough Distillery Pure Mile Group Clean Up.

In Memoriam:
**Honoring the Legacy
of John Medlycott and
Geoff Seymour**



**John
Medlycott**



**Geoff
Seymour**

The deaths of 2 influential directors, John Medlycott and Geoff Seymour of the Wicklow Uplands Council in just over a year has been a shock to remind us of our own mortality. John (died 12th June, 2023) was a founder member of Wicklow Uplands Council and had just stepped down as a director in the belief, it was time for new blood on the Board. Geoff died, very much in harness as the Treasurer on 22nd June 2024. Both were tireless in striving to foster the aims and ideals of WUC.

Though their approaches to problems were different, both prioritised listening and then distilling the essence of all points of view. This pragmatism and infinite common sense helped persuade people of the wisdom of this approach. They had the ability to assess the consequences of decisions, both cautious but not overly so, willing to accept the new but aware of possible impacts and the effects on the environment, communities and the lives of so many people. Their actions have left the world in a better place. May we now continue to follow in their footsteps. (particularly on the walks both fostered). Wicklow Uplands Council feels the loss of two highly respected colleagues, but we recognise that this sorrow is felt most profoundly by their cherished families.

May they rest in peace.

Wicklow Mountain Views



Directors of Wicklow Uplands Council 2023\2024

Farmer & Landowner Panel

Donie Anderson
Owen Brady
Denis Halpin
Sean Malone
Mary Catherine Murphy
Daniel Molloy
Joe Morrissey

Environmental and Recreational Panel

John Ferns
Hannah O'Kelly
Máire O'Connor
Louis O'Byrne

Community Panel

Garvan Hickey
Aideen Klauer
Claire Chambers
Mary Kelly-Quinn

Economic and Tourism Panel

Sean Byrne
Eugene Stephens
Geoffrey Seymour (Deceased June 2024)
Dairine Nuttall

CoOptions

Tom Byrne
Pat Dunne
Carmel Kealy
Michael Keegan
Philip Maguire
Declan O'Neill

Wicklow Uplands Council Team

Lorna Kelly.....Coordinator
Máire Dewar..... Administration
Officer

Statement

The Views and Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Wicklow Uplands Council.

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Mission

**To support the sustainable use of the Wicklow Uplands through consensus
and partnership with those who live, work and recreate there.**