



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma
Leitrim County Council



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2030



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Foreword from Leitrim County Council

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Executive Summary

The **Leitrim County Council Draft Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2030** (hereafter referred to as the *Biodiversity Action Plan*) sets out a strategic framework to conserve, restore, and enhance biodiversity across County Leitrim. Developed under the guidance of the Heritage Council and aligned with Ireland’s 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan, this plan reflects a whole-of-council and whole-of-community approach to biodiversity stewardship. The Biodiversity Action Plan responds to the urgent need to address biodiversity loss, habitat degradation, and climate change impacts at the local level.

Leitrim’s rich natural heritage—from upland heaths and ancient woodlands to wetlands, grasslands, and coastal habitats—faces increasing pressures from climate change, habitat loss, invasive species, and pollution. This Biodiversity Action Plan responds to these challenges with a clear vision: **to create a thriving, resilient natural environment where biodiversity flourishes and there is a harmonious balance between nature and human activities.**

The plan is built around **six strategic objectives**, each supported by targeted actions and measurable indicators:

1. **Raise awareness through education and community engagement**
Empowering communities, schools, and individuals through workshops, events, and accessible resources to foster a culture of biodiversity stewardship.
2. **Protect and restore natural habitats and native species**
Mapping and conserving key habitats such as wetlands, woodlands, and grasslands, and enhancing ecological connectivity across the county.
3. **Tackle and raise awareness of Invasive Alien Species (IAS)**
Promoting native species, supporting community-led removal efforts, and developing coordinated responses to prevent the spread of IAS.
4. **Promote and celebrate sustainable land use practices**
Encouraging biodiversity-friendly farming, forestry, and urban planning practices that support climate resilience and community wellbeing.
5. **Track progress through monitoring and evaluation**
Using ecological surveys, GIS mapping, and citizen science to monitor biodiversity trends and inform adaptive management.
6. **Provide funding, resources, and support for biodiversity actions**
Securing financial and human resources, building capacity within the Council, and supporting community access to funding and expertise.

The plan was shaped through extensive public consultation and collaboration with the **Leitrim Biodiversity Working Group**, which includes representatives from local government, community organisations, NGOs, state agencies, and agricultural bodies. It integrates biodiversity into local governance and aligns with national and EU policy frameworks, including the Nature Restoration Law, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Water Framework Directive.



Implementation of The Biodiversity Action Plan will be supported through partnership working, funding from national and EU programmes, and annual progress reviews. By fostering collaboration, building capacity, and embedding biodiversity into local governance, Leitrim County Council aims to safeguard its natural heritage for current and future generations.

Vision Statement

To create a thriving, resilient natural environment where biodiversity flourishes and there is a harmonious balance between nature & human activities.

Introduction

The Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 – 2030 sets out the role of Leitrim County Council working in partnership with key stakeholders to deliver the actions listed over the 5-year lifespan of the plan. This plan is written in the context of the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 – 2030. The Biodiversity Action Plan was developed under the guidance of The Heritage Council, to which the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme is intrinsically linked. One of the key strengths of the Biodiversity Officer Programme is its emphasis on integrating biodiversity considerations across all local authority functions. This holistic approach is reflected in the objectives and actions outlined in The Biodiversity Action Plan and aims to strengthen cross-departmental collaboration to maximise biodiversity benefits.

What is Biodiversity and why does it matter?

Biodiversity is a term that describes the variety of life on earth. It comprises all living things from plants, birds and mammals, to insects, microbes and fungi and the ecosystems – bogs, forests, river, oceans, grasslands etc. – that they are part of. Healthy ecosystems are vital for human health and wellbeing, underpinning food production and food security, giving us clean water and fresh air, protecting against climate change, providing the basis of many modern medicines and enriching our lives both culturally and spiritually. Over 31,000 species have been recorded in Ireland and its surrounding seas and many more have yet to be discovered.

In May 2019 Ireland became the 2nd country in the world to declare a Climate & Biodiversity crisis. Biodiversity is in trouble across a range of species and habitats. Biodiversity faces many risks at a local, national, and global level that have contributed to an overall loss in wildlife, species extinctions and habitat loss.

To halt and reverse the decline of biodiversity it is essential to employ a whole of ecosystem approach. While individual species conservation can achieve success in the short term, species require healthy functioning habitats to maintain long term stable populations.



Humans depend on healthy ecosystems to provide us with the following:

- Fresh water
- Food
- Clean air
- Resources e.g. wood, paper, medicines
- Flood control
- Climate regulation
- Recreation & Amenity
- Culture & History

These are called ecosystem services that are essential for life on earth and without them, life would become very inhospitable for humans.

“TO PROTECT OURSELVES, WE MUST PROTECT NATURE”

Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin,

Chair of the Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss in Ireland

Aim of the Biodiversity Action Plan

To record, conserve, restore and promote biodiversity, and to increase awareness, understanding and appreciation of biodiversity among the people of the area.

The Biodiversity Action Plan is designed to provide a structured approach to biodiversity conservation at the Local Authority level. It outlines the objectives and actions needed to protect and enhance biodiversity within a specific Local Authority area. The Biodiversity Action Plan provides the context for Leitrim County Council to work with and support local communities, state agencies, NGOs and landowners.

Everyone has a role to play in the protection and restoration of nature and it is important that we all play our part. Action for biodiversity has increased significantly in recent years, with a strong emphasis being placed on collaboration with landowners and local communities to enable a collective response to the challenge.

"It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living."

Sir David Attenborough



Developing the Biodiversity Action Plan

Scope and Timeframe

Biodiversity Action Plan Stages

1

PREPARATION

Secure agreement of the Management team and establish a Biodiversity Working Group. Gather background data and identify gaps.

2

VISION AND OBJECTIVES

Agree the broad aims of the Biodiversity Plan with the Biodiversity Working Group

3

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public consultation stage one: produce a discussion paper, hold meetings, and invite submissions.

4

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Identify the issues and needs, agree objectives and actions, and prepare a draft plan, liaising with colleagues and the Working Group. AA and SEA Screening.

5

PLAN REVIEW

Present the draft plan to the Management Team and SPC for comment/approval.

6

PUBLIC REVIEW

Public consultation on draft plan: make the plan available online through libraries and hold meetings.

7

PLAN APPROVAL

Revise the draft plan and present it to Senior Management, the appropriate SPC(s) and full Council for approval.

8

PUBLICATION

Publish and launch the new Biodiversity Action Plan.



Biodiversity Working Group:

The biodiversity working group is a non-statutory advisory group established by the local authority to provide observations and advice on the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the Biodiversity Action Plan. The role of the working group is to collaborate with the Biodiversity Officer in developing the plan, provide feedback and assistance in the implementation of the objectives and actions, to monitor progress and to evaluate the impacts of the plan.

Membership of the biodiversity working group is representative of the local population, reflecting the range of geographic, biodiversity expertise and population interests and may be drawn from the following sectors:

- Community and voluntary groups
- Local heritage and biodiversity organisations or groups
- Local Authority
- Environmental NGO's
- Local elected representatives
- Local development and business
- State agencies of relevance to biodiversity conservation
- Educational institutions
- Agricultural representatives

Members of the Biodiversity Working Group 2024 - 2025

Organisation	Name & Role
Leitrim Co. Co.	Rebecca Cogan Biodiversity Officer
Leitrim Co. Co.	Pio Byrnes Senior Executive Planner
Leitrim Co. Co.	Sarah Malone Heritage Officer
Leitrim Co. Co. Elected Members	Cllr. Brendan Barry Cllr. James Gilmartin Cllr. Paddy Farrell
LAWPRO	Orla Feely Catchment Scientist



Public Participation Network (PPN)	Mella O’Brolchain PPN Linkage Group Representative & Facilitator
Leitrim Development Company	Ashling Cartright Rural Development Project Officer
Leitrim Development Company	Emma O’Hagan Rural Recreation Officer
National Parks and Wildlife Service	Rob Wheeldon Divisional Ecologist
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Ailish Keane Senior Fisheries Environmental Officer
Coillte	Sandra Walsh Ecologist
Leitrim Sustainable Agriculture Group	Carol Durkin Member
ACRES Breifne	Aife Kearns Senior Project Officer
Teagasc	Cian Condon Outreach & Innovation Specialist
Irish Farmers Association	Gerry Mc Garry Rural Development Officer
WaterLANDS (EU LIFE)	Dr Guaduneth Chico Action Site Coordinator
Leitrim Environmental Network	Blaithin Gallagher Chairperson
Woodlands of Ireland	Joe Gowran Chief Executive



Breeding Waders EIP	Annie Birtwistle Project Officer
Physical Environment SPC	Trevor Seery SPC Representative



Public Consultation Process of Developing a Biodiversity Action Plan

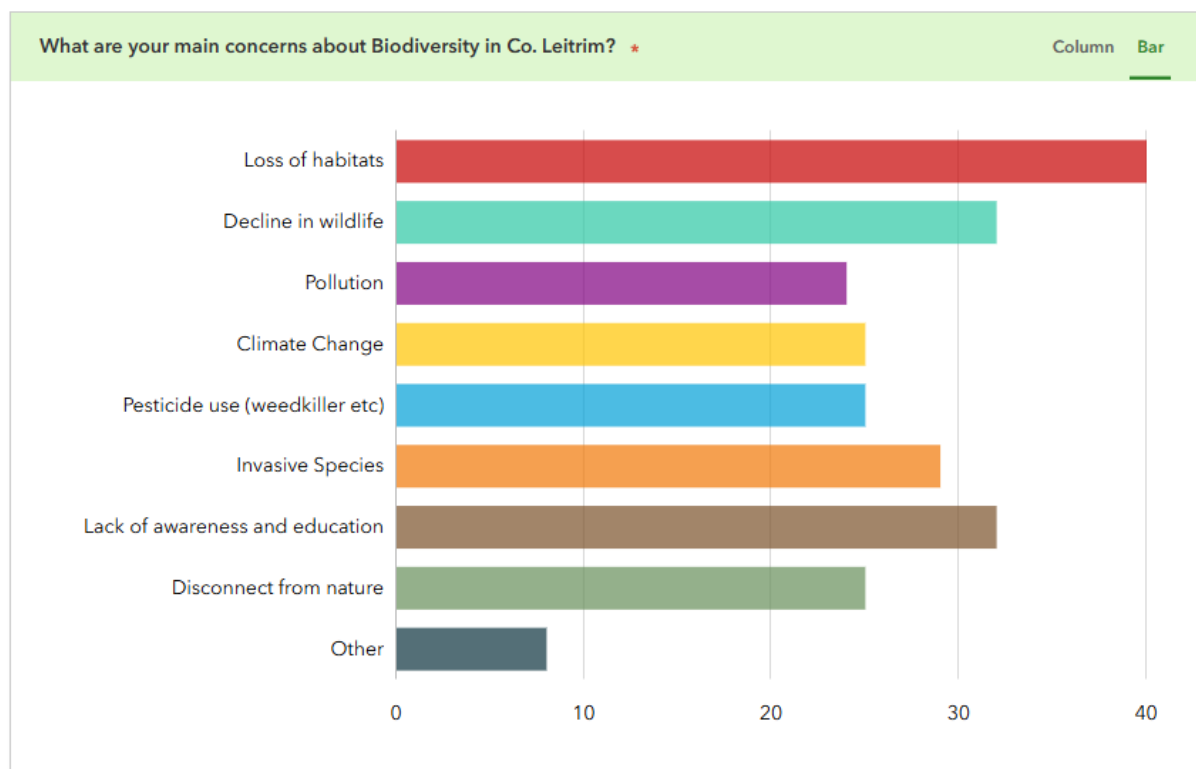
Outline and timeline of Process

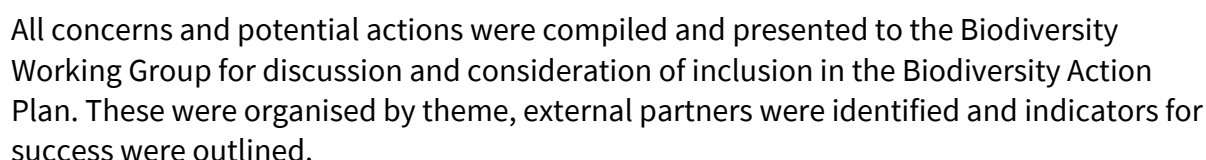
During Autumn 2024, the Biodiversity Officer with Leitrim County Council undertook a pre-draft public consultation process whereby the public were invited to submit their views. A discussion paper was developed to outline the aim of the Biodiversity Action Plan and to stimulate interest and encourage public participation to help identify local biodiversity issues and needs.

Submissions were invited from people through an online portal and by post/email. Drop-in workshops took place in the libraries in Carrick on Shannon, Ballinamore and Manorbhamilton to facilitate discussion and feedback. In addition, consultation was carried out with participants attending public events for National Biodiversity Week and National Heritage Week in 2024.

People were asked to express their main concerns in relation to biodiversity, the changes they had noticed in Co. Leitrim and the actions they would suggest for protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

The main concerns of participants from the online consultation.





The Draft Objectives and Actions were then presented internally in Leitrim County Council as part of the Climate Action Committee to gather feedback and to identify internal partners. Following this, the Draft Actions were presented to the Physical Environment SPC and Leitrim County Council Senior Management Team for review and approval.

Biodiversity in Ireland

Scientific assessments of the state of nature in Ireland have found that 85% of our EU protected habitats are in unfavourable status, with almost half (46%) demonstrating ongoing declines. This is having negative impacts on wildlife. Almost a third of our EU protected species are in unfavourable status, over half of native Irish plant species have declined. Over half of our 100 bee species have undergone substantial declines and 30% are threatened with extinction. 21% of breeding and 52% of key wintering bird species were reported to have short term declining trends. Almost half of our lakes (46%) and rivers (45%) are not meeting biological quality targets according to EPA's 2023 Indicators Report.

Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024 by the EPA has emphasised that the overall current assessment for nature is "very poor". The report highlights some of the key messages on Nature:

- The Irish landscape is heavily modified by humans. Many of the few remaining natural and semi-natural habitats are in a poor or bad state. Research in Ireland highlights



that 85% of our protected habitats and almost one-third of our protected species of flora and fauna are in unfavourable status, over half our native plant species are in decline and more than 50 bird species are of high conservation concern. The leading causes of these declines are changes in agricultural practices, including intensification; pollution; the increasing spread of invasive species; and our changing climate.

- Our natural habitats and biodiversity have been squeezed to the margins of our landscape and policies, while food production and economic development have been prioritised. However, nature underpins our food production, food security and economic development. We risk our future if we continue to marginalise nature, and its protection, and fail to deliver adequate, achievable, impactful, evidence-based and coordinated action to protect and restore it.
- Biodiversity loss affects everyone. It is essential that nature protection, enforcement, management and restoration are mainstreamed across government, social and economic sectors and are fully considered at all levels of national, regional and local decision-making.
- Nature can recover if given the opportunity. For example, Ireland's corncrake population has risen by more than 35% in recent years, reflecting the outcome of a multi-million euro conservation investment that began in 2019. Positive actions to halt declines and to restore the key elements of our natural world must be implemented.

Threats:

We are living through a period of significant biodiversity decline globally. There are recognised threats to biodiversity that have an impact at a local and national level. Our local biodiversity is facing pressures which is resulting in declines in species richness and species abundance.

Biodiversity is one of our biggest allies in reducing the impact of climate change. Healthy ecosystems need to be conserved to increase resilience to climate impacts. As we transition to a biodiversity rich and climate neutral economy by 2050, we must tackle climate breakdown at a local level.

The main threats being faced for biodiversity both nationally and locally in Co. Leitrim include:

- Climate change
- Habitat loss and fragmentation
- Invasive alien species
- Pollution – air, water, soil, light
- Disturbance to wildlife by human activity
- Overexploitation
- Land drainage
- Agriculture
- Monoculture Forestry



Human behaviour patterns are driving biodiversity loss and transforming these behaviour patterns is essential if we are to reverse the trends of loss. Therefore, we all have a role to play in the protection and restoration of nature.



Policy Context

EU and international Policy

The Nature Restoration Law (NRL)

The Nature Restoration Law is the first continent-wide, comprehensive law of its kind. It is a key element of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 which sets binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems, in particular those with the most potential to capture and store carbon and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters.

Europe's nature is in alarming decline, with more than 80% of habitats in poor condition. Restoring wetlands, rivers, forests, grasslands, marine ecosystems, and the species they host will help

- increase biodiversity
- secure the things nature does for free, like cleaning our water and air, pollinating crops, and protecting us from floods
- limit global warming to 1.5°C
- build up Europe's resilience and strategic autonomy, preventing natural disasters and reducing risks to food security

The Nature Restoration Law sets out ambitious targets for member states in the EU. Ireland is currently developing its Nature Restoration Plan and will set out restoration measures needed to achieve the targets set by the EU NRL. The development of The NRL is being coordinated by the NPWS with engagement from all key stakeholders. Leitrim County Council's Biodiversity Action Plan will support the NRL initially by supporting the collection of biodiversity data and providing a scientific basis for potential restoration of natural habitats and ecosystems.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals





The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all 193 United Nations member states in 2015. It is a “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” and provides an internationally agreed framework to balance the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The Framework is made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) and 169 targets with the overall objective of achieving a more sustainable, prosperous and peaceful future for all.

The Sustainable Development Goals, National Implementation Plan 2018-2020 acknowledges that local government “has a crucial role to play in translating national policies into tangible practical actions that can help to concretise the SDG objectives into our individual and communities’ behaviours and goals.” Following this, Ireland’s second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024 under Strategic Objective 2 focuses on integration of the SDG’s in “Local Authority work to better support the localisation of the SDGs” and incorporate specific actions to do so which include:

- i. Showcasing, sharing and building on existing initiatives.
- ii. Capacity building and awareness raising.
- iii. Embedding the SDGs in Governance and reporting frameworks.
- iv. Incorporating the SDGs within local planning frameworks.
- v. Community Engagement

Furthermore, local authorities are recognised as one of Agenda 2030’s nine ‘Major Groups’, which play a crucial role in sustainable development. Agenda 2030 also highlights the particular role of local authorities and communities in sustainable urban development.

By aligning with the UN SDGs, the Biodiversity Action Plan demonstrates how local biodiversity efforts support international commitments to ensure a sustainable future.



Key SDG Links:

SDG 4 – Quality Education

The BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN promotes environmental education and public awareness, empowering citizens to understand and protect biodiversity.

SDG 15 – Life on Land

At the heart of the BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN is the protection and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems. Actions such as habitat enhancement, species conservation, and invasive species control directly advance this goal.

SDG 13 – Climate Action

Nature-based solutions like peatland restoration, tree planting, and green infrastructure help mitigate climate change and build resilience in communities.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

Collaboration is central to the BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN. It fosters partnerships with local communities, schools, farmers, NGOs, and government agencies to deliver shared biodiversity outcomes.

Supporting SDG Links:

SDG 2 – Zero Hunger

The BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN supports sustainable farming practices that protect biodiversity while enhancing food security.

SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being

Access to nature and green spaces supports mental and physical health, especially in rural communities.

SDG 6 & 14 – Clean Water and Life Below Water

Wetland conservation and riparian buffer zones improve water quality and aquatic biodiversity.

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

Urban greening, pollinator corridors, and biodiversity-friendly planning contribute to healthier, more liveable towns and villages.

SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production

Promoting sustainable land use and resource management helps reduce environmental pressures.

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN encourages inclusive governance, transparency, and community empowerment in biodiversity decision-making.



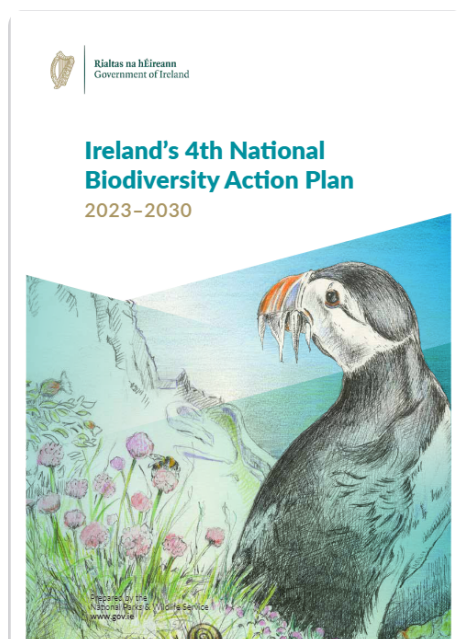
By embedding the SDGs into the Biodiversity Action Plan, Leitrim County Council is demonstrating leadership in sustainable development. This alignment ensures that local actions contribute to national and global goals, unlocking opportunities for funding, collaboration, and long-term impact.



National Policy & Plans

National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 - 2030

The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan, 2023 – 2030, 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”.



Ireland in 2050 – A Vision for Biodiversity

Biodiversity in Ireland is valued, conserved, restored and sustainably used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.

The National Biodiversity Action Plan sets out Ireland’s framework for biodiversity conservation using the following Strategic Objectives:

1. Adopt a whole of government, whole of society approach to biodiversity
2. Meet urgent conservation and restoration needs
3. Secure nature’s contribution to people
4. Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity
5. Strengthen Ireland’s contribution to international biodiversity initiatives



The National Biodiversity Action Plan emphasises the role of local authorities in implementing specific actions to protect and restore biodiversity. Of the 195 actions listed under the five strategic objectives, 23 actions from five strategic objectives are deemed the responsibility of our local authorities. The actions relevant to local authorities are listed in the Appendices.

The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan contains an action for all local authorities to develop their own Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan by the end of 2026. The National Biodiversity Action Plan also sets out an action for Biodiversity Officers to be appointed in each Local Authority. The Heritage Council has worked with Local Authorities and supported the rollout of the Biodiversity Officer Programme. Biodiversity Officers are the vital link between national policy and local action. In addition to collecting data, carrying out conservation projects and raising awareness, Biodiversity Officers advise the local authority on biodiversity related issues and its obligations in relation to the protection of biodiversity. The Biodiversity Officer role also involves significant community engagement to raise awareness and foster local support for biodiversity initiatives.

Leitrim County Council's Biodiversity Action Plan will be a document setting out the overall objectives and actions for conserving and enhancing biodiversity in Co. Leitrim. It will also aim to achieve the objectives in the National Biodiversity Action Plan that the Local Authority has responsibility for and will help to direct the council's response to the biodiversity crisis.

The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023 introduced a new public sector duty on biodiversity. The legislation provides that every public body, including Local Authorities are obliged to have regard to the objectives and targets in the National Biodiversity Action Plan with a statutory annual reporting requirement.



Water Framework Directive

The EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) requires all Member States to protect and improve water quality in all waters so that we achieve good ecological status by 2015 or, at the latest, by 2027. It was given legal effect in Ireland by the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722 of 2003). It applies to rivers, lakes, groundwater, and transitional coastal waters.

The Directive requires that management plans be prepared on a river basin basis and specifies a structured method for developing these plans. River basin management plans, which are reviewed and prepared every six years after extensive public consultation, are designed to protect and improve the water environment.

Water Action Plan 2024

A River Basin Management Plan for Ireland sets out the measures that are necessary to protect and restore water quality in Ireland. The overall aim of The Water Action Plan is to ensure that our natural waters are sustainably managed and that freshwater resources are protected so as to maintain and improve Ireland's water environment.

The Water Action Plan enhances and builds upon the work of the first and second cycle plans and builds on strengthening the incorporation of the integrated catchment management approach, improving the environmental ambition, along with improving the evidence base for targeting the right measures in the right place and securing dedicated resources.

Each local authority supported by LAWPRO will conduct assessments of other water bodies where the pressures are unknown (which are not within priority areas for action) to identify the specific issues and actions that are required to protect or restore water quality as necessary. The Water Action Plan specifically acknowledges the importance of the Local Authorities Biodiversity Officers and on the role Local Authorities can play in the mapping, control and eradication of invasive alien species.

All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021 – 2025

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025 is a five-year road map that aims to help bees, other pollinating insects and our wider biodiversity. It encourages a better way of managing our whole landscape to permanently support our struggling biodiversity.

While the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan is coordinated by the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) the responsibility of action delivery is shared out between the main partner organisations.

Leitrim County Council has adopted the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, a national framework which aims to make Ireland a place where pollinators thrive and survive.



As a council partner of the AIPP, this demonstrates the Council's long-term commitment to support pollinators in County Leitrim and annual reports are submitted to the National Biodiversity Data Centre on the Council's actions to protect pollinators. The Biodiversity Action Plan has been developed to incorporate actions to fulfil the objectives of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028

The Heritage Council Strategic Plan advocates for conservation of our natural heritage while also encouraging vital new approaches as the impacts of climate change emerge. It stands on the front line of fighting the effects of climate change and the protection of biodiversity. The Heritage Council supports the work of the Biodiversity Officer by providing professional training, provision of network supports and funding.

The Biodiversity Action Plan reflects the 6 strategic pillars of the Heritage Council Strategy 2023 – 2028:

1. Leadership and Stewardship
2. Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss
3. Research
4. Partnership
5. Communities
6. Education and Engagement

Local Policy & Plans

The Leitrim County Council Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030 has been developed with consideration of the strategic vision and objectives of other local authority plans.

Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029

The Leitrim County Development Plan sets out the strategic plan, policy and objectives for the development of the County. The County Development Plan seeks to ensure the sustainable physical and social development of the county, ensuring the conservation and protection of the built and natural environment. The Plan seeks to ensure that wildlife species and habitats are conserved, features of heritage interest protected, watercourses and ground water safeguarded from pollution and the beauty of the landscape maintained.

Heritage and Biodiversity is outlined in Chapter 11 of the County Development Plan. It is the aim of the Council to conserve, sustainably manage and enhance the county's natural heritage and biodiversity and to promote understanding of and sustainable access to it.



The Goals which the County Development Plan seeks to realise in relation to natural heritage and biodiversity are:

1. The protection of fragile ecosystems and species and habitats so as to ensure that biodiversity is maintained, and vulnerable habitats protected.
2. The protection and conservation of non-renewable resources and their settings, where settings are considered important.
3. The enhancement of opportunities for the enjoyment of the natural heritage.

‘Green Infrastructure’ can be defined as strategically planned and interconnected networks of green space and water capable of delivering ecosystem services and quality of life benefits. Green Infrastructure can include parks, open spaces, rivers, farmland, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens which surround and intersperse our towns and villages. The Council’s land use plans will protect, manage and provide, where possible, ‘Green Infrastructure’ in an integrated and coherent manner.

Leitrim County Council Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029

The vision of Leitrim County Council’s Climate Action Plan is aligned to the Government’s National Climate Objective which seeks to achieve the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy by 2050. Leitrim County Council’s Climate Action Plan will be implemented through a whole-of-council approach working collaboratively with all stakeholders.

Strategic Goal 3: Natural Environment & Green Infrastructure

To enhance the natural environment of County Leitrim to work in support of nature-based solutions for climate resilience and emission reductions whilst promoting enriched biodiversity.

Leitrim County Council’s actions will support the preservation and enhancement of the natural environment of County Leitrim and will increase the provision of green infrastructure where possible.

Carrick on Shannon Decarbonising Zone

The Decarbonising Zone (DZ) will be a focus for sustainable place-based climate action opportunities including mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity enhancement. The goal of the DZ is to deliver the National Climate Objective at local and community levels to provide a test bed of learning and understanding on the scale of the challenge, that can be applied elsewhere in County Leitrim.



DZ Objectives:

1. Enhance and protect the natural environment and biodiversity of Carrick-on-Shannon
2. Support nature-based solutions for climate resilience and emission reductions whilst promoting enriched biodiversity
3. Create vibrant green spaces for the community

Leitrim Heritage Plan 2020 - 2025

The Leitrim Heritage Plan 2020 – 2025 sets out objectives and actions to help understand, promote and conserve the heritage of the county for future generations. To date, actions for natural heritage have been included in the Heritage Plan.

Leitrim County Council Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029

The vision of the Corporate Plan is to create an ambitious, thriving, vibrant, sustainable and connected Leitrim with opportunity for everyone. One of the key strategic goals within the Corporate Plan is to Enrich our Places and Environment. The Corporate Plan outlines key actions under Climate Action, Biodiversity and environmental protection.

Leitrim Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2023-2029

The LECP is a strategic framework developed by Local Authorities to promote and support the economic and community development within their areas. It acknowledges the importance of combatting climate change and embracing sustainability to preserve and enhance Leitrim's diverse and beautiful natural landscape.

Objective 2.2 of the plan is to ensure the protection of the environment and biodiversity for future generations.

This objective, at its core, looks to protect Leitrim's natural environment for current and future generations. This will include implementing initiatives that help to protect and enhance Leitrim's biodiversity, continuing work to identify, understand and preserve habitats in the County, and directly addressing issues that may pose challenges to the County's environment.

Carrick on Shannon Joint Local Area Plan (JLAP) 2025 – 2031

The aim of the Joint Carrick-on-Shannon Local Area Plan 2025 - 2031 (JLAP) is to establish a framework for the planned coordinated and sustainable development of Carrick-on-Shannon. This JLAP has been prepared to deliver a collaborative and integrated framework for the future development of the town. It is the first such joint plan for the



town and it has a strong focus on the development of both the Carrick-on-Shannon and Cortober areas of the town.

Chapter 8 discusses the built and natural heritage in Carrick on Shannon. Through its objectives, The JLAP will promote increased awareness of the built and natural heritage of Carrick-on-Shannon and seek to manage our heritage and recognise its enormous potential to improve the overall well-being and quality of life of the town's residents and visitors alike.

County Leitrim Biodiversity Action Plan 2022 - 2027

Leitrim Development Company developed a County Leitrim Biodiversity Action Plan to coincide with the period 2022-2027. The plan adopts a cross-sectoral approach to promote actions for biodiversity at an individual, community and county level to ensure the benefits of biodiversity for our local environment and society are experienced by as many as possible. Leitrim County Council has been a partner of this plan and actions within this plan have been considered as part of the preparation and public engagement stages of Leitrim County Council's Biodiversity Action Plan.



Leitrim County Council's legal responsibilities for the protection of Biodiversity

EU Habitat Directive

The EU Habitats Directive is the most important nature conservation legislation in Europe. This Directive aims to maintain and restore the favourable conservation status for habitats and species which are rare and threatened throughout Europe. The Directive requires member states to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) for habitat types and species that require conservation as part of a Europe-wide coherent ecological network called Natura 2000.

EU Birds Directive

The Birds Directive requires member states to designate Special Protection Areas (SPA) to protect the most important bird areas in the country.

EU Water Framework Directive

This Directive provides a framework for the protection and improvement of all our waterbodies - groundwater, rivers, estuaries and coastal waters with the aim of achieving 'good' status (both ecologically and chemically) by 2027.

Wildlife Acts

The Wildlife Acts (1976 to 2018) and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2020 are Ireland's primary national legislation for the protection of wild flora and fauna in Ireland. Under the Wildlife Act, Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and Refuge for Fauna (RFF) conserve species and habitats of national importance.

Flora Protection Order, 2022

The current list of plant species protected in Ireland is set out in the Flora Protection Order, 2022. Under the Flora Protection Order it is illegal to cut, uproot or damage the listed species in any way, or to offer them for sale. This prohibition extends to the taking or sale of seed. In addition, it is illegal to alter, damage or interfere in any way with their habitats. This protection applies wherever the plants are found and is not confined to sites designated for nature conservation.

A full list of legislation, policies and plans are outlined in the Appendices.



Biodiversity in Co. Leitrim

Leitrim harbours a rich variety of wildlife due to its diverse mix of habitats. From the rugged uplands, glacial valleys and lakes in the north of the county, to the extensive network of rolling drumlin hills which span a mosaic of slow-flowing wetlands. This diversity extends to a gentler topography of floodplains and raised bogs in its southernmost reaches. Leitrim can be considered as still retaining some of its original natural identity in part through the retention of smaller field boundaries harbouring areas of low-intensity species-diverse grasslands alongside pockets of native woodlands that all contribute to the county's natural beauty and biodiversity.

Uplands

North Leitrim is characterised by the distinctive shapes of mountain tops, plateaus, sheer limestone cliffs and steep scree slopes. Notable landmarks include the Dartry Mountains bordering Sligo, and the imposing vista of Slieve Anierin to the east. Often flanked by large coniferous plantations along their slopes and in some intervening areas, open windswept plateaus are often carpeted by Ling and Bell Heathers on wet and dry heaths. These heathers provide food and shelter for birds such as Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus hibernicus*), an enigmatic species so closely interwoven with these expanses but which has experienced declines. Wetter areas of upland blanket bog and wet heath provide habitat for nesting Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), still present in low numbers in Ireland as a breeding species outside of those overwintering from Iceland.

The Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), an iconic raptor which is characteristic of the uplands, still breeds within suitable habitats of Leitrim's uplands. As a ground nesting bird, it prefers the protection of mature heather and low-level scrub including areas of pre-thicket secondary rotation forestry. However, as these plantations mature they become unsuitable and provide sources for predation that are negatively contributing to a national population in serious decline.

Tievebaun Mountain to the north of Truskmore forms part of the imposing entranceway into the Glenade valley, facing the Arroo Mountain to the north. Certain north-facing cliffs and slopes within the valley and on Arroo retain some of the restricted arctic-alpine and montane floral assemblages in Ireland. Within Leitrim, there are four such species, all listed on the Flora protection Order. Tea-leaved willow (*Salix phylicifolia*), a shrub characteristic of damp mountain scree slips, is restricted solely to the northern faces of Tievebaun and Arroo Mountain in Ireland, whilst Chickweed Willowherb (*Epilobium alsinifolium*) is found only along the ledges and slopes of Cloontypruglish, Glenade. Northern Rock Cress (*Arabidopsis petraea*) and Shade Horsetail (*Equisetum pratense*) also have restricted all-Ireland distributions.

Leitrim's important upland habitats are not confined to peatlands alone, with some upland grassland sites also meeting the criteria for Annex I habitats. *Semi-natural dry*



*grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (*important orchid sites)* [6210] occur on thin, well-drained soils, typically found on some of the upland scree slopes in North Leitrim. *Limestone Pavement* [8240] has a restricted range in Leitrim's uplands, while some species-rich wet grasslands also include the Annex I habitat '*Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels*' [6430], typified by Greater Wood Rush (*Luzula sylvatica*). Such grassland communities are all sensitive to overgrazing. The diminutive Small White Orchid (*Pseudorchis alba*) growing on wet, nutrient-poor habitats such as acidic grasslands and heathlands, is a unique flower of the uplands and on the Flora Protection Order, but has experienced heavy declines in Ireland as a result of agricultural improvements.

Wetlands

The course of the River Shannon meanders south through the county from Dowra (Cavan) to Roosky (Roscommon). Lough Allen sits along its route, forming the largest lake in the county, covering an area of some 35 km², approximately 4.7 km² of which is in Co. Roscommon. The lake in effect divides Leitrim into two halves, before the River Shannon continues its journey south to Carrick on Shannon, and then further along the Roscommon border towards Co. Longford. This system, together with other slow-flowing vegetated waterways in south Leitrim, provide important refuges for wintering flocks of Whooper Swans (*Cygnus cygnus*) and other waterbirds such as Wigeon, Teal and Lapwing, alongside resident ducks, grebes and Mute Swans. Such wetlands are also home to a rich variety of invertebrates, including dragonflies and damselflies.

Lough Melvin forms Leitrim's second largest lake at some 21 km², shared in part with Co. Fermanagh. With an oligotrophic-mesotrophic nutrient status, and fed by upland streams, Lough Melvin is home to three genetically distinct trout that are now recognised by the IUCN as distinct species from the Brown Trout - the Ferox, Gillaroo and Sonaghan. Lough Melvin holds a special title as the only lake in Europe with these fully reproductive, genetically-isolated trout species, reinforcing the uniqueness and importance of the lake.

Cold oxygen-rich upland streams are home to the Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*), which has the special ability as Ireland's only perching bird that can walk underwater when foraging for caddisfly larvae. Salmon return to suitable stretches of Leitrim's rivers each year in declining numbers to spawn in gravel beds, whilst the White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*), a protected Annex II species, can be found hiding under stones and boulders of clean rocky streams and lakes alongside Brook Lampreys (*Lampetra planeri*) which act as ecosystem engineers in modifying their spawning grounds.

Lowland raised bogs pepper the landscape south of Mohill around Lough Rynn, Dromod and Roosky. Whilst having experienced peat extraction and drainage in the past, some of these diverse habitats have been able to retain fragments of Leitrim's formerly widespread breeding population of Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), now largely restricted to pockets of suitable habitat within South Leitrim. Their breeding range also includes areas



of suitable semi-natural wet grasslands to the east and south of Drumshanbo which can provide suitable cover for nesting and chick-rearing away from the larger stands of conifer plantations further north.

The jewel in Leitrim's wetlands is the return of the Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) as a breeding species in the county. Once extinct in Ireland, a pair were first recorded as successfully breeding in 2024 in the state after an absence of over two hundred years. This followed on the foot of another breeding pair in nearby Co. Fermanagh, heralding their imminent return. Feeding on a diet of fish expertly caught from the water's surface, this enigmatic species will hopefully spread to recolonise old haunts on Leitrim's lakes and rivers.

Grasslands

Due to the underlying glacial gleys and subsequent poor drainage, much of the soils within Leitrim are of a lower quality for agricultural purposes. As a consequence, Leitrim still retains patches of semi-natural grasslands which have avoided intensification. This includes those wet grasslands (Fossitt code GS4) that are well represented on upland slopes and smaller field systems in the drumlin belt. Such semi-natural grasslands can harbour diverse plant communities that are considered as high nature value (HNV) grasslands, receiving reduced nutrient inputs and supportive of representative wildflower communities including orchids, Ragged Robin and Devil's-bit Scabious - the larval food plant of the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly. Categorized as Vulnerable in the European Union, this declining species is listed on Annex II of the Habitats Directive. Agricultural reseeding and afforestation would form the greatest threats to these plant communities and the Marsh Fritillary.

Woodlands and hedgerows

The 4th National Forestry Inventory, completed in 2022, indicated that Leitrim has the highest level of forestry plantations in Ireland, contributing to a total forestry cover of 18.9% in 2017 when compared to the national average of 11.6%. Much of this is comprised of non-native conifers including Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) and Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta*) for commercial use.

Outside of these monocultures, the county is also home to a variety of native and non-native broadleaf woodlands, scrub, and mature hedgerows. These areas can provide essential habitats and ecological corridors for breeding, shelter and foraging by birds, mammals and invertebrates, alongside important ecosystems services including carbon storage, air and water quality. Leitrim's climate means that many of these woodlands are comprised of saturation-tolerant broadleaves such as alder, birch and willows. Planted non-native beech woodlands are also widespread in the county. Ivy also provides a crucial source of food in the autumn and as an overwintering habitat for hibernating species such as the Brimstone Butterfly (*Gonepteryx rhamni*) in their natural range of the Shannon basin. Leitrim's widespread population of Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) has been hit hard by Ash



Dieback, caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, with some trees exhibiting varying levels of resistance.

A provisional inventory of ancient and long-established woodlands (ALEW) of Ireland was first produced by NPWS in 2010, identifying established areas of continuous cover woodland in Ireland. Long-established woodlands were present on the first edition OS maps of 1830, whilst ancient, old-growth woodlands, have been in existence since 1660.

Some of these ALEW sites identified in Leitrim include O'Donnell's Rock woods south of Manorhamilton (Hazel coppice), long-established broadleaf woodlands at Derrycarne Demesne on the eastern shore of Lough Boderg, possible ancient Oak woodland of the Garadice Lough peninsula, and long-established Oak woodlands around the eastern flanks of Lough Gill, which conform to the Annex I habitat '*Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles*' [91A0]. Remnants of wet woodland fringing some of Leitrim's rivers and lakes also meet the criteria of the Annex I habitat '*Alluvial woodland with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)*' [91E0], composed primarily of seasonally inundated Alder and Ash woodland.

Good quality Annex I woodlands are typically multi-layered, with a well-developed understorey and a good complement of fallen and standing dead wood. Positive indicator species include ferns, mosses and liverworts characteristic of these woodlands that develop slowly over time but are now increasingly scarce in Ireland, and many sites are in a deteriorated condition from human interventions and heavy browsing by animals such as deer.

The Ancient Woodlands Ireland research project, in conjunction with Maynooth University, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Woodland Trust, Teagasc, DAFM and DHLGH, aims to evaluate the conservation status of ancient and long-established woodlands in further detail beyond the ALEW inventory by using historic maps and text with contemporary aerial images and paleoecology. Leitrim formed one of two preliminary case study counties, in which 1102ha of long-established and 266ha of potential ancient woodland were identified, representing 0.7% and 0.17% of the county respectively.

(Irish Wildlife Manual 153: Mapping, monitoring and protecting ancient and long established woodland in Ireland 2024)

Coastline

Leitrim can be often be overlooked as a coastal county, incorporating the short 5km section of the Tullaghan coastline between the Duff and Drowes Rivers of Sligo and Donegal. Whilst maybe inconspicuous, the Bunduff Lough and Machair / Trawalua / Mullaghmore SAC (000625) extends into the western section of Leitrim's coastline to east of the Duff River, in part due to formations of the prostrate-growing shrub Juniper (*Juniperus communis*). Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena Phocoena*) now also forms part of this SAC, foraging offshore along the coastal reefs.



In a global context, Leitrim's coast is now part of Ireland's contribution to the network of 'Important bird and biodiversity areas' (IBAs) recognised by Birdlife International. The Leitrim coastline is incorporated into the Outer Donegal Bay (marine extension) seabird IBA, assessed in 2024. It now recognises in a global context the utilisation of this maritime area by populations of Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*), European Shag (*Gulosus aristotelis*), Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) and Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*).

Designated sites

Due to the variety of landscapes present that still retain important habitats and species within the European context, Leitrim is understandably well represented in its coverage by designated sites of National or European importance. Collectively, there are 45 designated sites contained wholly or partly within the county. These sites have been identified for the presence of 24 Annex I habitats and 9 Annex II species (EU Habitats Directive) (92/46/EEC) and 2 Annex I birds (EU Birds Directive) (2009/147/EC), highlighting the special nature of Leitrim in a country-wide context.

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

North Leitrim is especially well represented by its suite of seven SACs. These are designated to protect the important and extensive uplands of the Dartry Mountain range, alongside the Cuilcagh-Slieve Anierin uplands, Boleybrack Mountain and the two large glacial lake systems of Lough Melvin and Lough Gill. The smaller Glenade Lake SAC harbours White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) and the protected water plant Slender Naiad (*Najas flexilis*).

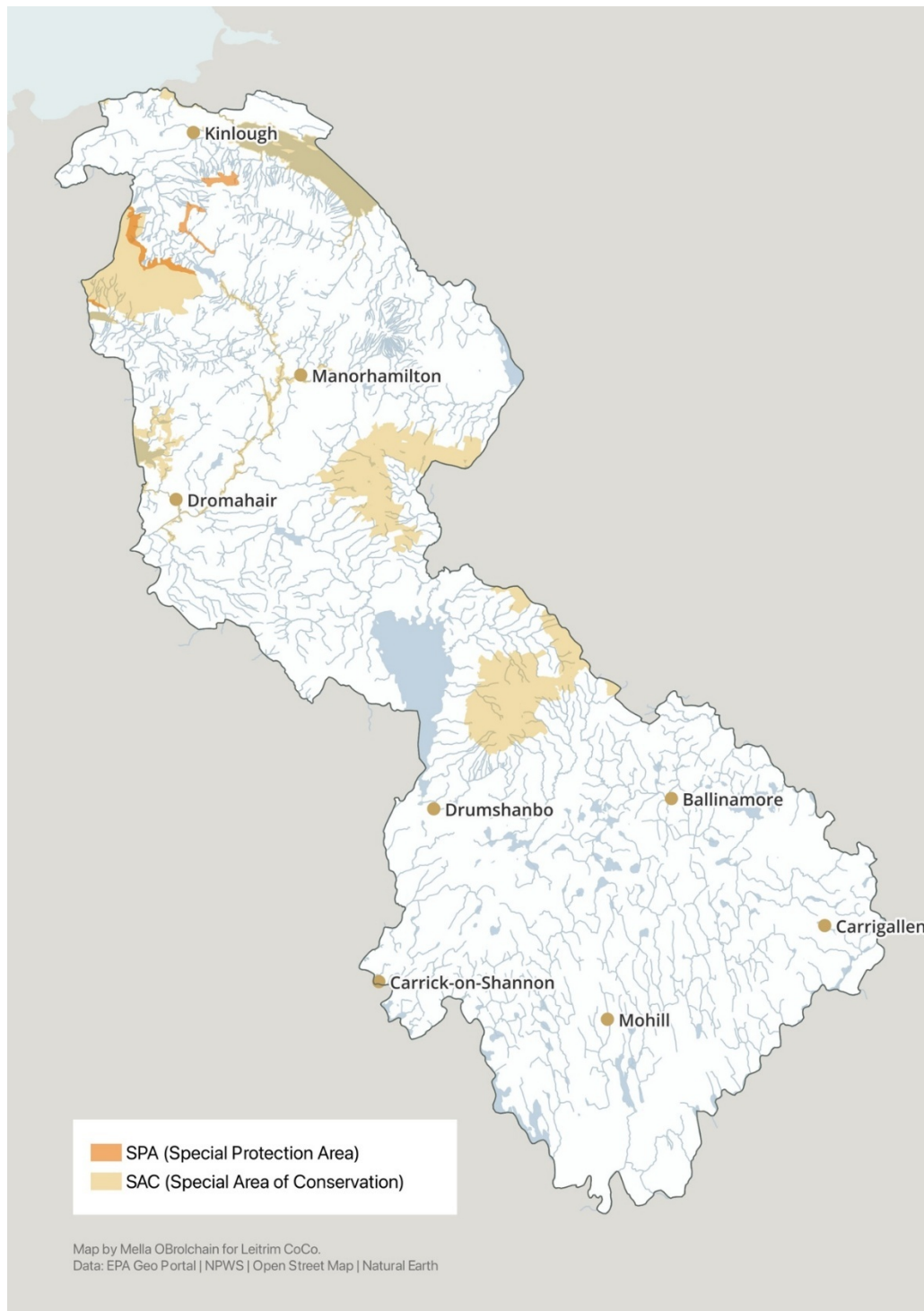
The Benbulbin, Gleniff and Glenade Complex SAC, shared between Sligo and Leitrim, and Arroo Mountain SAC both encompass a vast mosaic of blanket bog and wet heath. These SACs also include an impressive number of other associated qualifying interest habitats, including alpine and boreal heaths, siliceous and calcareous screes at higher elevations, alkaline fen, and petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) – formed from calcified liverworts and mosses. Further east lies Boleybrack Mountain SAC and Cuilcagh-Anierin Uplands SAC, flanking the northern and eastern sides of Lough Allen respectively and forming part of the boundary with County Cavan to the east.

Special Protection Area (SPA)

Sligo-Leitrim Uplands SPA [004187] is the only SPA in Leitrim, this designation consists of six sections of limestone cliffs and associated slopes within the Glenade, Gleniff and Glencar valleys, alongside north-facing sections of Arroo Mountain and Benbulbin, which overlap their associated SACs in both counties. Two Annex I species under the Birds Directive form the qualifying interests for the site, namely Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) & Red-billed Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*). Peregrines utilise suitable cliff ledges isolated from ground predators for nesting. Crevices and holes within the cliff faces provide crucial nesting habitat for Chough in association with the short-sward grassland



slopes for foraging. The Sligo and Leitrim Uplands IBA (27175) is also recognised by Birdlife International for its regionally important population of Chough.





Special Protection Area (SPA)

Sligo/Leitrim Uplands SPA (004187)

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

Arroo Mountain SAC (001403)

Ben Bulbin, Gleniff and Glenade Complex SAC (000623)

Boleybrack Mountain SAC (002032)

Bunduff Lough and Machair/Trawalua/Mullaghmore SAC (000625)

Cuilcagh - Anierin Uplands SAC (000584)

Glenade Lough SAC (001919)

Lough Gill SAC (001976)

Lough Melvin SAC (000428)

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs)

Categorised as nationally important sites on a statutory basis, the network of NHAs were implemented via the Wildlife (Amendment) Act (2000) for the protection of habitats and species within Ireland. Leitrim harbours a total of 9 NHAs, only 4 of which are wholly within the county boundaries in their entirety. The remaining sites are shared between Counties Sligo (1), Co. Roscommon (1) and Co. Longford (3). All are designated for the protection of peatlands, characterised by the differences in terrain between the north and south of the county in this context by including both upland blanket bogs, that accompany the upland SAC network in north Leitrim, and some of the lowland raised bogs to the south. Upland NHAs protect some similar habitats as with the SACs that are representative of the terrain but are more focused on blanket bogs and associated habitats with the species that they support.

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs)

Aghavoghil Bog NHA (002430)

Aghnamona Bog NHA (000422)

Cashel Bog (Leitrim) NHA (001405)

Cloonageeher Bog NHA (001423)

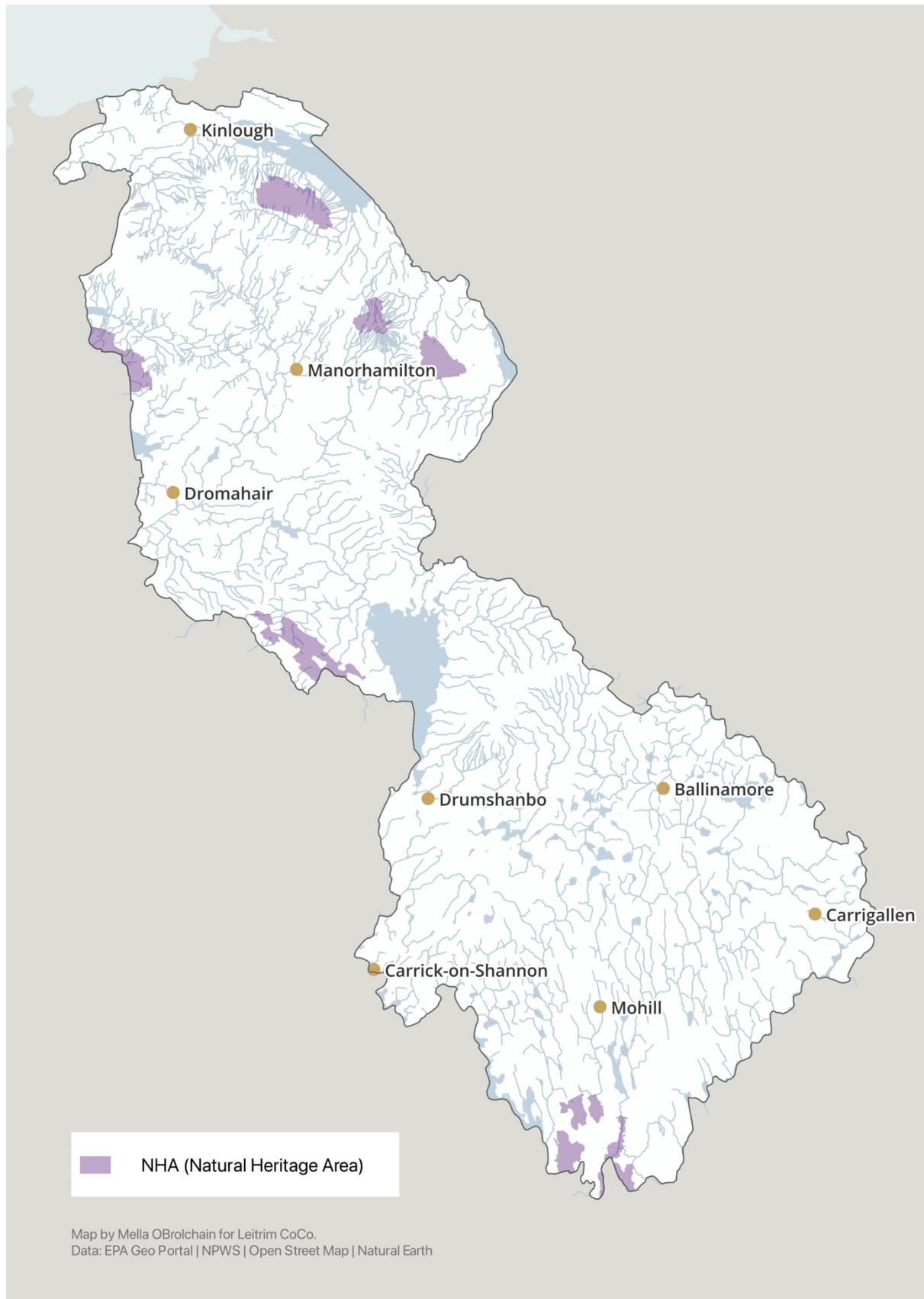
Corracramph Bog NHA (001420)

Corry Mountain Bog NHA (002321)

Crockauns/Keelogyboy Bogs NHA (002435)

Dough/Thur Mountains NHA (002384)

Rinn River NHA (000691)





Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs)

Identified for notable habitats and populations of species of local importance, the full list of pNHAs was published in a National context on a non-statutory basis. Within Leitrim, there are 28 sites that encapsulate individual woodland and wetland habitats of local importance. Woodland pNHAs are representative examples of florally rich oak, hazel and wet alluvial woodlands in the county. Garadice Lough Wood (001413) is an example of an important Annex 1 Habitat: Old Oak Woodland 91A0. Native oak woodlands are rare in Ireland and this site with two quite distinct oak communities is a site of high scientific interest.

Other pNHAs partly overlap with SACs, identified prior to the Habitats Directive being fully enacted in Ireland in relation to upland blanket bogs. Some pNHAs have also been proposed for the rare or protected species that they contain, such as Kilgarriff Marsh pNHA (000426) on the northern shores of Lough Allen. This pNHA harbours the Flora Protection Order species Thread Rush (*Juncus filiformis*), Mudwort (*Limosella aquatica*) and the orchid Irish Lady's Tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*). This orchid has a restricted range in Ireland, confined largely to seasonally flooded lake shores and grasslands in parts of the west and north of Ireland, including Lough Allen.

County Biodiversity Areas (CBAs)

Other important habitats in Co. Leitrim that are non-designated sites provide wildlife corridors to the wider ecological network and add biodiversity value to the county. These include wetlands, rivers, lakes, woodlands, hedgerows, grasslands, road verges, green urban spaces, gardens and parks. Although these sites are of great importance at county or local level, many of them, to date have not been fully surveyed or recognised as such. It is critical to the overall ecological network and biodiversity value of County Leitrim that these sites are identified, valued, and conserved. There is an obligation on local authorities to identify such sites and reflect them in the county development plan. Accordingly, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan has an important role in supporting this process.

In order to inform this process, Leitrim County Council has commissioned and continues to commission habitat surveys. (e.g. hedgerows, wetlands and unimproved grassland)

Biodiversity Surveys in Co. Leitrim

The Local Biodiversity Action Plan depends greatly on the quality of data it uses to make informed decisions. Much of the biodiversity data is held by the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) and NPWS. The NBDC plays a pivotal role in gathering and curating biodiversity data across Ireland, providing a critical resource for Local Authorities. The data and analysis provided by the NBDC will be used to inform and regularly update local Biodiversity Action Plans, ensuring that policies are responsive to emerging trends and



grounded in the best available evidence. Actions within the Biodiversity Action Plan will enhance the precision and efficacy of local biodiversity conservation efforts.

Leitrim County Council has directly commissioned studies on different aspects of biodiversity under the Heritage Officer/Biodiversity Officer programme. The following provide valuable baseline data for biodiversity in Co. Leitrim

Leitrim Barn Owl Survey 2025

Final Report will be available at the end of 2025

Recording Irish Mayfly; establishing conservation status 2024 – 2025

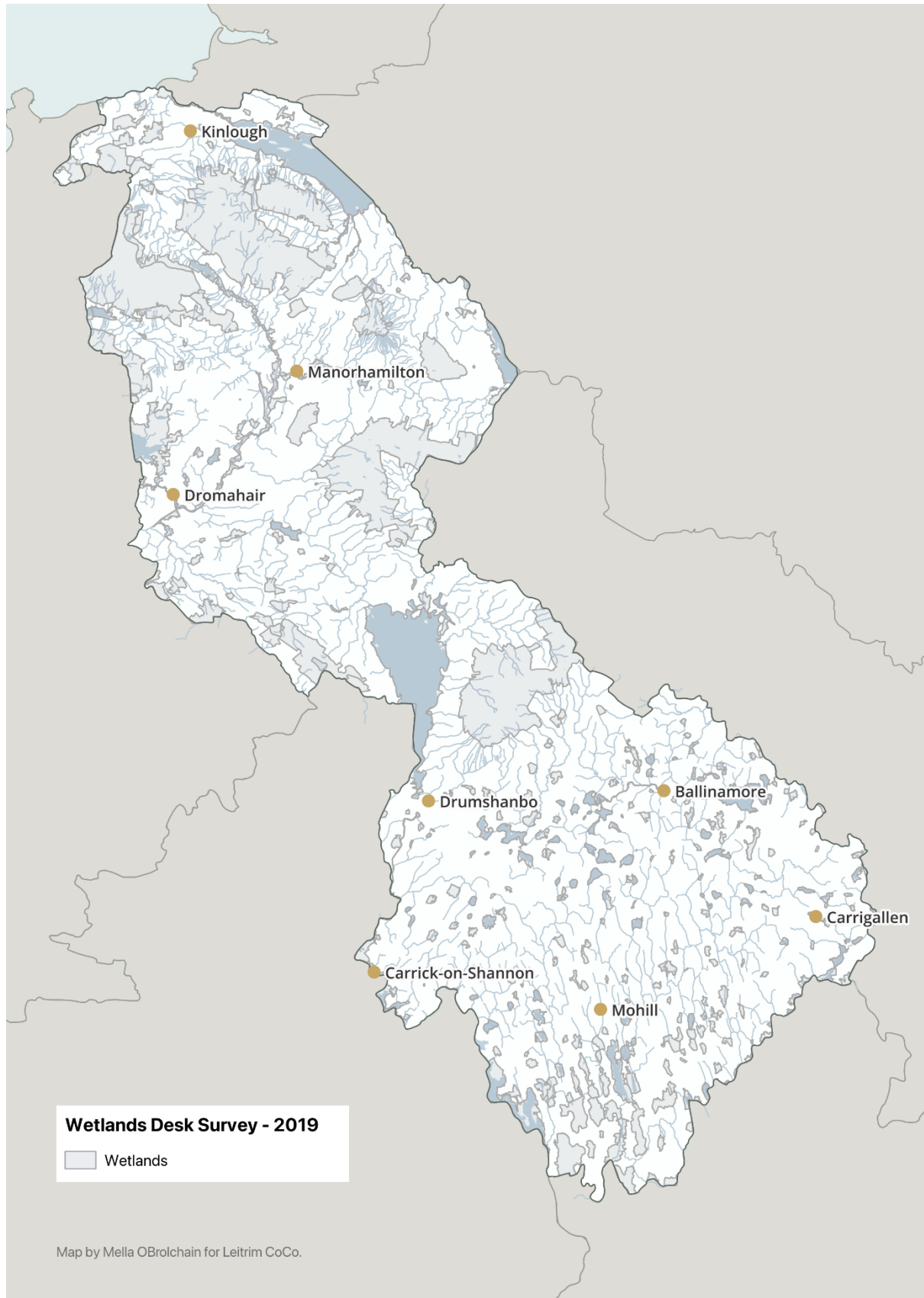
Final report will be available at the end of 2025

County Leitrim Wetlands Surveys 2019 - 2024

In 2019 Leitrim County Council commissioned the County Leitrim Wetland Study which aimed to map all wetland areas in the county. This study found that larger lakes, blanket bog and wet heath areas dominated the northern half of the county, with smaller raised bogs and other discrete wetland sites occurring more frequently in the southern half. It is estimated that 23.5% of County Leitrim is covered in wetlands with a total surface area of approximately 375km².

Ecological field surveys were carried out by Wetlands Survey Ireland on some of the Wetland habitats in Co. Leitrim in 2021, 2023 and 2024. The final reports are available to view at the links below.

<https://www.leitrim.ie/council/services/biodiversity/biodiversity-projects/wetlands-surveys/>





Leitrim Swift Survey 2020

Swifts are a small migratory bird that visits Ireland each year to nest. They travel from southern Africa where they have spent over eight months of the year. Swifts have adapted to nesting in cavities found in buildings in our cities, towns, and villages.

However, their future is seriously threatened in Ireland due primarily to the loss of nesting sites. BirdWatch Ireland conducted a Swift Survey in County Leitrim in 2020 which has recorded and mapped swift nesting sites. The support and active engagement of local communities is critical to building greater awareness of this unique bird species and in undertaking conservation action where it is most needed.

For more information on Swifts and the survey in Co. Leitrim please visit:

<https://www.leitrim.ie/council/services/biodiversity/biodiversity-projects/swift-survey/>

Co Leitrim Hedgerows Appraisal Survey 2023

County Leitrim's hedgerow network is a huge asset to the county, being valuable in terms of the predominantly livestock-based agricultural systems, biodiversity, water quality, landscape, carbon sequestration and flood control. During the summer of 2023, the same area as in 2006, (and where possible the same individual hedgerows) was re-surveyed using the Hedgerow Appraisal System. Results from the 2023 County Leitrim Hedgerow Appraisal Survey were compared, as far as possible, with those from the 2006 Survey to assess trends in the extent, status and condition of hedgerows.

For more information on the hedgerows please visit:

<https://www.leitrim.ie/council/services/biodiversity/biodiversity-projects/hedgerows-in-co-leitrim/>



Objectives and Actions

The tables below set out the objectives and actions that will guide Co. Leitrim's biodiversity work over the next five years. These objectives and actions have been developed through a structured process that included a review of local, national and EU policy, legal obligations, with comprehensive input from the Leitrim Biodiversity Working Group as well as through a public pre-draft public consultation. The objectives and actions respond directly to the challenges and opportunities outlined in previous chapters, including the need to protect the county's rich and varied biodiversity. They also form the basis for annual reporting under the Council's Biodiversity Duty, in line with Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan. The Biodiversity Action Plan will contribute to the fulfilment of statutory obligations under the Wildlife Acts, and the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, and other relevant national and EU legislation which require public authorities to conserve biodiversity and support climate adaptation and resilience in the delivery of their functions.

The objectives and actions aim to enhance stakeholder engagement, establish baseline data and integrate biodiversity across local authority functions.

Objective 1: Raise awareness of biodiversity through education and community engagement

Objective 2: Protect and restore natural habitats and native species

Objective 3: Tackle and raise awareness of Invasive Alien Species (IAS)

Objective 4: Promote and celebrate sustainable land use practices

Objective 5: Track progress through monitoring and evaluation

Objective 6: Provide funding, resources and support for Biodiversity Actions

Each objective is supported by a set of specific actions, informed by local knowledge, existing initiatives and the requirements set out in national policy. Actions are also ranked by priority for implementation over the five-year period, with colour code of red indicating high priority and green indicating lower priority.



Objective 1: Raise awareness of biodiversity through education and community engagement

This objective focuses on fostering a deeper public understanding and appreciation of biodiversity through inclusive education and active community participation. By engaging schools, faith communities, local groups, and individuals, the plan aims to build a culture of stewardship and connection to nature. Initiatives include workshops, biodiversity-themed events, and the creation of accessible resources and information hubs, ensuring that biodiversity becomes a shared responsibility across all sectors of society.

Theme	Action No.	Action	Partners	Indicators/Measure of Success
Community Engagement	1.1	Promote the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan	NBDC, Community Groups LAWPRO, Leitrim PPN	No. of communities engaged No of public events
	1.2	Establish partnerships with community groups to promote, support and implement local biodiversity initiatives	Community Groups, Tidy Towns, NPWS, IFI, LAWPRO, ENGOS, LDC	No of communities engaged No of initiatives/projects
	1.3	Work with faith communities to identify lands & buildings to implement biodiversity measures in collaboration with local communities.	Faith Communities, NBDC, Heritage Council	No of faith communities engaged No of projects implemented
	1.4	Support local communities with the creation and implementation of Community Biodiversity Action Plans	Community Groups, LDC, CFI	No of CBAPs developed No of actions from CBAPs implemented
Education, Training & Resources	1.5	Share field resources for use by community groups, schools and individuals for biodiversity projects and monitoring programmes	Heritage Council (ESKER), NBDC, IEN	No. groups using resources Library records of ESKER kit



	1.6	Facilitate and support workshops, field trips, public events and public awareness campaigns to foster biodiversity awareness and connection to nature	Community Groups, LAWPRO, LDC,	No. of communities engaged No of public events Public awareness campaigns
	1.7	Create a central information hub to provide the public with environmental organisational responsibilities and contact information	LEN, Leitrim PPN	Online information hub
	1.8	Celebrate Biodiversity Week and Heritage Week with public events to raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity	Community Groups, NPWS, LEN	No. of communities engaged No of public events No of participants attending
	1.9	Deliver climate-themed events and ensure sustainability and climate action are integrated into all events through the development of local authority-wide policy on events	Community Groups	No of public events No of participants attending
	1.10	Promote and expand the delivery of the Heritage in Schools Programme to Primary schools	Heritage Council	No. of schools visited by Heritage Specialist



Objective 2: Protect and restore natural habitats and native species

This objective prioritizes the conservation and restoration of Leitrim's diverse ecosystems and native species. It includes mapping and protecting key habitats such as wetlands, woodlands, and grasslands, and enhancing ecological connectivity across the county. Actions under this objective support evidence-based conservation, collaboration with landowners and national bodies, and the implementation of best practices for managing public lands and biodiversity-sensitive areas.

Theme	Action No.	Action	Partners	Indicators/Measure of Success
Protection of Habitats and Native Species	2.1	Identify wetland habitats of local and national importance using Wetlands Surveys Ireland data for potential conservation and restoration projects	NPWS, Acres, Landowners	No. of wetland sites surveyed Prioritised list of wetland sites
	2.2	Identify, protect and restore areas of native ancient woodlands	NPWS, Woodlands of Ireland, Coillte, Community groups	Map of Native Woodlands Area of woodland identified for protection and restoration projects No. of native woodland projects
	2.3	Support initiatives under the WFD that contribute to the restoration of ecology in water bodies, and the blue dot catchments programme	LAWPRO	No of catchment projects
	2.4	Develop an ecological network map of the county to identify wildlife corridors and develop a plan to increase connectivity across the network and collaborate with neighbouring LA's	NPWS	Map of ecological network using all map layers and data from surveys
	2.5	Investigate feasibility of implementing recommendations from hedgerow appraisal survey where appropriate	Hedgerows Ireland, landowners, community groups	Prioritised list of measures implemented



	2.6	Identify and map County Biodiversity Areas (CBA) according to Heritage Council Guidance and support initiatives to protect these sites.	NPWS, Heritage Council, Swift Conservation Ireland, Coillte, BCI, BWI, Breeding Waders EIP, Community Groups	No of County Biodiversity Areas mapped
	2.7	Undertake County grassland surveys and identify potential grassland sites for conservation and restoration	NPWS, Acres, LSAG	No of grassland sites identified and surveyed
	2.8	Support the creation of ponds and restoration of wetland habitats on public and private lands	Burren Beo Trust, Community Groups, Landowners	No of ponds and wetland habitats created/restored
Biodiversity on public land	2.9	Identify Local Authority land that may require ecological surveys and highlight areas that may be at risk and require protection	NPWS	Map of Public land bank No of areas identified for ecological surveys
	2.10	Implement the AIPP as a Council partner and manage public land in line with AIPP guidelines	NBDC	Actions submitted to NBDC through annual reports
	2.11	Investigate opportunities for planting native forestry on public land through the Forestry Programme 2023 - 2027 (e.g. FT3 Forests on Public Lands)	DAFM, Coillte, Community Groups,	No. of public sites identified Area of public land planted with native woodland
	2.12	Develop an artificial lighting policy to incorporate environmentally friendly lighting practices in rural and urban areas where possible	Community & residential groups	Artificial lighting policy developed



	2.13	Explore the potential for the development of a new wetland ecology park off the Leitrim Road, Carrick-on-Shannon as a hub for nature-based tourism whilst ensuring that the biodiversity of the wetlands is both maintained and protected.	Leitrim Development Company, Carrick Tidy Towns	Feasability study developed
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Objective 3: Tackle and raise awareness of Invasive Alien Species (IAS)

Invasive Alien Species pose a significant threat to native biodiversity. This objective aims to address the issue through a combination of public education, community-led action, and strategic mapping and management. By promoting native species, supporting removal efforts, and developing coordinated responses with stakeholders, the plan seeks to reduce the impact of IAS and prevent their spread across Co. Leitrim.

Theme	Action No.	Action	Partners	Indicators/Measure of Success
IAS Outreach & Education	3.1	Develop an integrated programme to raise awareness of invasive alien species to help identify, prevent, manage and eradicate invasive species	NPWS, DAFM, Acres, LDC, NBDC, Landowners, Community groups, IFI, TII,	Development of training programme and resources No. of training workshops No. of participants
	3.2	Promote Irish provenance native trees and plants to community groups, landowners and all stakeholders	LDC, NBDC	No. of public workshops Awareness campaigns Public projects incorporating native trees/plants
Action for IAS	3.3	Survey and map the presence of IAS throughout the county	NPWS, NBDC, Community Groups, Acres, DAFM, Farm Advisors	No and type of IAS surveys Distribution Map of IAS
	3.4	Organise and support the removal of IAS by community volunteers and landowners	NPWS, Community Groups, LAWPRO, Acres	No of events and participants Map of areas of IAS removal
	3.5	Work with other stakeholders to map the presence of Japanese Knotweed on public sites and implement management plan to eradicate it	NPWS, Teagasc, Acres, NBDC	Map of JK distribution Management Plan



			Area of JK treatment & eradication
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Objective 4: Promote and celebrate sustainable land use practices

This objective encourages land use practices that support biodiversity, climate resilience, and community wellbeing. It includes promoting pesticide reduction, sustainable agriculture, native forestry, and biodiversity-friendly urban planning. Through collaboration with farmers, landowners, and community groups, the plan supports the transition to land management approaches that are ecologically sound and socially beneficial.

Theme	Action No.	Action	Partners	Indicators/Measure of Success
Pesticides	4.1	Develop and adopt a pesticide reduction strategy for Leitrim County Council	NBDC	Pesticide reduction strategy Water Quality data - Drinking water and WFD results
	4.2	Deliver a public awareness raising campaign about pesticide use and the effects of pesticides on the environment and on human health	Community & Residential groups, Schools, Teagasc, Leitrim Organic Farmers	Awareness raising campaigns No. public events
Hedgerows, Trees & Forestry	4.3	Promote Forestry schemes that encourage planting native trees and community ownership of forestry	DAFM, landowners, community groups	No of native woodland schemes Area of native woodland planted
	4.4	Work with farmers and landowners to promote good practices for hedgerow management	LDC, Teagasc, Acres, IFA, LSAG	No. public events No of participants No. of hedgerows measures in Acres



Agriculture	4.5	Encourage low-intensity farming practices that enhance biodiversity, organic farming and support farmers in protecting high nature value farmland	LSAG, Acres	No of events Scores of Acres farms No of farmers in biodiversity protection initiatives
	4.6	Promote agricultural practices that implement actions to prevent agricultural run off, protect riparian buffer zones and improve water quality	LAWPRO, Acres	No of events Scores of Acres farms No of farmers in water protection initiatives WFD Water quality data
Peatland	4.7	Promote and support projects and landowners that are restoring peatlands to store carbon and to protect biodiversity	WaterLANDS, Acres	No of participants Area of peatland under restoration
Management of Urban Green Spaces	4.8	Support the creation of public and connected green spaces and wildlife corridors in Carrick on Shannon (DZ) and in other urban areas to enhance biodiversity, health and wellbeing.	Community Groups, Landowners, Chamber of Commerce, Carrick Tidy Towns	No of groups/participants No of public events Area of connected green spaces Map of wildlife corridors
	4.9	Provide advice on incorporating biodiversity measures and nature based solutions where appropriate in capital projects	Community Groups, Landowners	No. engagements prior to and during project planning Examples of NbS incorporated into projects



	4.10	Promote and celebrate biodiversity friendly practices in residential areas, community spaces and council properties.	Community Groups, Landowners	No. of groups/participants No of events Love where you live awards
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Objective 5: Track progress through monitoring and evaluation

Effective biodiversity action requires robust data and ongoing evaluation. This objective ensures that progress is tracked through ecological surveys, GIS mapping, citizen science, and collaboration with biodiversity organisations. It supports the establishment of a Biodiversity Working Group and promotes adaptive management based on evidence, helping to refine and improve actions throughout the life of the plan.

Theme	Action No.	Action	Partners	Indicators/Measure of Success
Ecological data	5.1	Compile and incorporate ecological data from previous surveys into internal GIS systems and provide access to GIS mapping and data for relevant staff	NBDC	GIS Map layers available
	5.2	Carry out ecological surveys to ground truth non-designated sites that have been identified as County Biodiversity Areas (CBAs)	Heritage Council, NBDC	No of sites identified No of surveys completed
	5.3	Identify gaps in the surveying and monitoring of species and support surveys and studies to fill knowledge gaps	NPWS, NBDC, Birdwatch Ireland, BCI	No. of surveys completed Type of ecological data collected
	5.4	Collaborate with other biodiversity organisations to share and publish data	NBDC, NPWS, Birdwatch Ireland, LAWPRO	No and type of data shared
	5.5	Undertake barn owl survey in Co. Leitrim and raise awareness of barn owls to the public and landowners in areas where they are likely to re-establish	Birdwatch Ireland Landowners, Teagasc, Acres	No. public events No of nests and breeding pairs identified No and location of boxes installed Monitor existing boxes
	5.6	Continue wetlands surveys on ecologically important sites that have been identified	NPWS, Wetland Survey Ireland	No. of wetland surveys carried out



	5.7	Encourage and support local communities, schools and citizen scientists to participate in biodiversity monitoring programmes to record ecological data	NBDC, NPWS, Birdwatch Ireland, LAWPRO, Bat Conservation Ireland,	No of public training workshops No of participants No of citizen scientists volunteering on Monitoring schemes
Monitoring & evaluation	5.8	Facilitate the Biodiversity Working Group which is made up of key stakeholders to monitor and evaluate the BAP	Biodiversity WG	No of meetings No of field visits/training events No of stakeholders on WG
	5.9	Conduct biodiversity surveys & audits to monitor progress and adapt management practices as necessary	NBDC, NPWS, Community groups	No and type of baseline surveys and follow up surveys carried out
	5.10	Report biodiversity measures adopted and progress made towards objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan	NPWS	Annual report on measures undertaken by LA for NBAP



Objective 6: Provide funding, resources and support for Biodiversity

Actions

To deliver on the plan's ambitions, this objective focuses on securing financial and human resources, building capacity, and embedding biodiversity into policy and planning. It includes supporting community access to funding, advocating for staff and training within the Council, and ensuring biodiversity is considered in all relevant policies. Strategic partnerships and student placements are also encouraged to bring new expertise and energy to biodiversity work in Co. Leitrim.

Theme	Action No.	Action	Partners	Indicators/Measure of Success
Financial resources	6.1	Apply for relevant funding for biodiversity projects and actions in the LABAP	NPWS, Heritage Council, LDC, LAWPRO, IFI,	No of successful funding applications/projects Amount of funding received
	6.2	Support community groups to apply for funding to develop community biodiversity projects	Community Groups, CFI, Heritage Council, NPWS, LEN,	No of successful groups receiving funding
Capacity building	6.3	Establish partnerships with local organisations and stakeholders to leverage additional resources and expertise	NPWS, Heritage Council, LDC, LAWPRO, IFI,	No and type of partnerships
	6.4	Advocate for adequate staff and financial resources within the Local Authority to implement actions from the LABAP	Heritage Council	Additional funding approved in annual budget
	6.5	Investigate opportunities to offer placements for 3rd level students and graduates	3rd level colleges	Partnerships with 3rd level colleges



	6.6	Develop and deliver a biodiversity training programme for Leitrim County Council staff & elected members	Heritage Council	Biodiversity training programme implemented No of participants No of training events
Policy	6.7	All relevant policies developed or updated within the council will consider biodiversity at the policy development stage		No of plans/policies with Biodiversity incorporated
	6.8	Incorporate biodiversity priorities into the next County Development Plan	All stakeholders	Biodiversity objectives outlined in CDP
	6.9	Promote best practice guidance and policies for biodiversity to relevant LA staff	External stakeholders	No of engagements with other departments



Acronyms

IEN	Irish Environmental Network
BWI	BirdWatch Ireland
HC	The Heritage Council
LEN	Leitrim Environmental Network
AIPP	All Ireland Pollinator Plan
LCC	Leitrim County Council
WSI	Wetland Surveys Ireland
CFI	Community Foundation Ireland
BSBI	Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland
ENGOS	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations
IFA	Irish Farmers Association
LAWPRO	Local Authority Waters Programme
BBT	Burren Beo Trust
CARO	Climate Action Regional Office
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine
LA	Local Authority
NBDC	National Biodiversity Data Centre
TLIs	Third Level Institutions
LSAG	Leitrim Sustainable Agriculture Group
RRO	Rural Recreation Officer
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
TT	Tidy Towns
LDC	Leitrim Development Company
BCI	Bat Conservation Ireland

Timeline

Urgent		Start 0- 2 years
Mid-Plan		Start 2- 4 years
If time/resources allow		Flexible
Annual/Ongoing		Ongoing



Implementation

Delivering meaningful biodiversity outcomes depends upon strong collaboration. Leitrim County Council will continue to work closely with local community groups, landowners, state agencies, environmental NGOs, researchers, and educational institutions. Partnerships will play a key role in co-delivering actions, sharing knowledge, and ensuring that local capacity is supported. The Leitrim Biodiversity Working Group will continue to act as an advisory body, supporting coordination and promoting inclusive, cross-sector engagement. Collaboration with neighbouring local authorities will also be pursued, particularly where habitat networks or species conservation require regional coordination.

Resourcing The Biodiversity Action Plan

The implementation of this plan will require a combination of financial, human, and technical resources. Leitrim County Council will continue to seek funding through national programmes such as the NPWS Local Biodiversity Action Fund and the Heritage Council's biodiversity grant schemes. Where relevant, opportunities for EU funding, private sponsorship, and collaborative applications with NGOs, Educational institutions, or neighbouring local authorities will also be pursued. Leitrim County Council will provide guidance to local groups and landowners interested in applying for biodiversity-related funding. Securing sufficient financial resources is essential to ensuring actions are delivered in a timely and impactful way.

Monitoring and evaluation

Annual progress reviews will be carried out by Leitrim County Council to assess implementation of the actions set out in this plan. These reviews will contribute to the Council's reporting obligations under Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan and will help identify what is working well, what needs adjustment, and emerging opportunities. Monitoring will include both internal evaluation and consultation with partners. At the end of the five-year period, a full review will be undertaken to evaluate overall progress and inform the development of the next Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan. Where possible, biodiversity data from Council-supported projects will be shared with relevant national bodies and platforms to contribute to the broader evidence base.

Recognising and sharing success is an important part of sustaining biodiversity work. Leitrim County Council will continue to highlight achievements whether through community actions, Council projects, or collaborative initiatives and promote the learning that comes from both successes and challenges. By sharing these stories and insights, the Council hopes to foster continued engagement, inspire new ideas, and support a learning culture around biodiversity at both local and county level.



Leitrim County Council wish to acknowledge the role of the Heritage Council in funding the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme and in particular, supporting the preparation and implementation of the Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan.



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma
Leitrim County Council



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Appendices

To be added

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Contae Liatroma
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Áras an Chontae
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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council