

# The Irish Hare

## THE DECADE WE SAVE NATURE

How we are mapping the path for nature's recovery in Northern Ireland

## HELP OUR HEDGEHOGS

Simple things you can do to help our prickly friends, plus how to take part in the Irish Hedgehog Survey

# Stop the badger cull

Have your say on government plans for a widespread cull of healthy badgers



**Ulster  
Wildlife**

# Welcome



The disappointing news that the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs is recommending an indiscriminate badger cull as part of a Bovine TB strategy has caused shock, anger, and deep concern (pp 4&5).

To date, Northern Ireland had escaped this controversial policy which has killed over 140,000 badgers in England since 2013. Following an independent review in 2018 of England's policies for eradicating bovine TB, the government there has subsequently committed to incentivising the uptake of effective biosecurity measures and managing the bovine TB risks posed by cattle movements. This will be complemented by badger vaccination.

In NI, more ethical alternatives exist with the 'Test, Vaccination or Remove' approach, however, this has been discarded on the basis of cost. 4 out of every 5 badgers that will be killed will be healthy, which is completely unacceptable given this is a protected native species.

**The power is now in your hands to stop the badger cull. Please join us in standing up for badgers, by signing our petition today and sharing your views via the online consultation.**

The crisis facing our wildlife and nature looms ever larger with a need to find pressing solutions. Now is the time for a green recovery that prioritises the restoration of nature, and its enjoyment by people, while tackling the climate and biodiversity crises. We are delighted to have teamed up with partners to put in place the mechanisms to create Northern Ireland's first Nature Recovery Network, to help stitch together and connect nature at a landscape scale (pp.8&9).

Hedgehogs are one such species that need a more joined-up landscape to find food, mates and nesting sites, and our gardens are a vital refuge. We know these prickly visitors are in trouble and need our help to survive, so this summer we're leading on the Irish Hedgehog Survey in Northern Ireland and want you to get involved (pp.6&7).

It is more important than ever that there is a strong voice for nature and thanks to your continued support, we can help nature recover, for its own sake and for the immense benefits it brings to our own lives.

*Jennifer Yulston*

Chief Executive of Ulster Wildlife

## Ulster Wildlife *Get in touch*

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## Together we're stronger

Here are some of the ways you've been helping to protect your local wildlife

**630** 

volunteers signed up to take part in the Irish Hedgehog Survey this summer, here in Northern Ireland. This will help us build a much better picture about the status of our prickly friends.

**You helped breeding seabirds** 

Thanks to your support, our annual programme of rat, scrub and bracken control, and traditional grazing at Isle of Muck Nature Reserve has created a haven for one of the largest colonies of breeding seabirds in Northern Ireland.

**1000+** 

households across Northern Ireland have pledged to take action to help garden wildlife by signing up to our 'Let Nature In' campaign.

## You helped shape NI's Climate Change Act

Thanks to your support, over 600 voices called for a strong and ambitious Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland, with all responses submitted as part of DAERA's consultation.



### SEE THIS

With its bright red cap and white spots, the fairy-like fly agaric fungus can be spotted growing from late summer onwards under birch and pine trees.

### LISTEN FOR THIS

Listen out on sunny days for the chirrup of the male grasshopper among the grass. They make their courting sound, known as stridulation, by rubbing their legs against their wings.

### SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

## Jellyfish

Jellyfish are wonderfully strange and alluring creatures of the sea. Mostly made up of water, these pulsing swimmers are a common sight around the coast of Northern Ireland during the summer months.

#### Fast growers

One incredible fact about jellyfish is that they are almost entirely made of water – some are 95% water! This allows them to grow big in a very short amount of time. The bigger they are, the less likely they are to be eaten by other animals in our seas. So being able to grow quickly is a clever evolutionary adaptation that acts to increase their survival.

#### Pulsing swimmers

While jellyfish are technically classified as plankton, because they drift around in our seas at the mercy of the wind, tides and ocean currents, they can control how deep or shallow they are in the water. Muscles contract rhythmically causing the umbrella to pulse, allowing them to swim. This helps them navigate to the most suitable depth at which to capture food.

#### Specialised stingers

People often come across jellyfish when they have washed up and stranded on the shore, sometimes in ones or twos, but other times in hundreds and thousands. If a jellyfish strands on a beach, it means that it has died. However, it's also likely that before dying, it grew up, reached adulthood, and reproduced, all of which happens in the space of a few summer months – a whole lifetime for a jellyfish.

However, jellyfishes' real beauty and elegance are only obvious when they are in their home environment, under the waves, pulsing their bell and feeding happily on tiny plankton. They do so using their specialized stinging cells called cnidocytes. Each cell



COMPASS JELLYFISH © MARK THOMAS IMAGES.CO.UK


contains a spring-loaded, toxic harpoon designed to paralyse and secure prey – plankton and small fish.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

In 1991, the American Space Shuttle Columbia took thousands of tiny ephyrae (baby jellyfish) into outer space. These grew into adult moon jellyfish – a species commonly found around the Northern Ireland coastline. NASA scientists were interested to find out how changes in gravity alter how jellyfish detect the environment around them. This means that more jellyfish have been to space than humans!

#### See them this summer

- **Strangford Lough:** Whether you are walking along the shore or out on a boat, keep an eye out for the small moon, blue, and lion's mane jellyfish from May onwards.
- **Isle of Muck:** As well as seabirds, the Isle of Muck, jutting out into the Irish Sea, is a perfect place to spy jellyfish.
- **Benone Beach and North coast:** With a more significant influence from the Atlantic, the North Coast is a prime location to spot the more exotic jellyfish species – the mauve stinger – later in the summer.

 Find out more about jellyfish in our A-Z of wildlife - [ulsterwildlife.org/wildlife-explorer](http://ulsterwildlife.org/wildlife-explorer)

### Top tips 3 SPECIES TO SPOT

#### Barrel jellyfish

These are some of the largest jellyfish we find around the UK. They can grow to over 1m in diameter and weigh more than 25kg.



© MARK THOMAS

#### Moon jellyfish

These jellies are very common all around the UK. They're easily recognized by the four purple rings, which you can see through the bell.



© MARK THOMAS

#### Lion's mane jellyfish

This is another large and vibrant looking jellyfish found in our seas, usually a darker red/brown colour. Watch out; this one can give a nasty sting.



# Badger cull proposed for Northern Ireland

The Department for Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA) has set out plans to cull healthy badgers as part of wildlife intervention measures proposed in its new strategy to eradicate bovine TB in Northern Ireland, which is currently out for consultation. Whilst we support many of the measures designed to combat the disease, we are strongly opposed to the indiscriminate killing of healthy badgers and are disappointed that more ethical alternatives, such as badger vaccination and 'Test, Vaccinate or Remove' (TVR), whereby only TB positive badgers are euthanized, have not been proposed, despite the positive results from DAERA's pilot study.

The consultation proposals involve a non-selective badger cull within bovine TB hotspots, using controlled shooting of free roaming badgers, delivered and paid for by farmer led companies. The vast majority of the badgers killed (80-85%) will be healthy and not infected by bovine TB. Whilst we recognise the hardships and significant implications of bovine TB for the farming community, and the need for effective solutions to address this costly disease, the slaughter of healthy badgers is not acceptable or proportionate in addressing the low level of risk associated with transmission of this disease by badgers, which are a protected and native species.

The spread of bovine TB is primarily through cattle to cattle, with animals spreading the disease mainly through coughing and sneezing, thus releasing bacteria into the air that are then inhaled by other animals in close

contact. This disease also spreads from infected cows to their offspring during suckling.

A widespread badger cull approach has been adopted in England and the Republic of Ireland. However, it has proved to be a very contentious and divisive policy that is widely opposed by the public, academics, environmentalists, animal welfare and animal rights organisations. Despite the cull in England, national herd incidence and the prevalence of bovine TB has increased slightly in the 12 months ending 31 March 2021. In 2019, after five years of culling, significant increases in bovine TB occurred in cattle within two of the original cull areas: Gloucestershire and Somerset. More than 140,000 badgers have been killed in England since 2013, causing a public outcry. DEFRA has recently announced that new culling licenses are to be banned after 2022. In the Republic of Ireland, 110,000 badgers have been culled since 1989 and over the past three years bovine TB has successively increased, mainly in areas of dairy herd expansion and higher stocking rates.

In contrast, Wales has seen similar decreases in the incidence and prevalence of bovine TB in cattle, using a much more ethical approach. This does not involve widespread culling of badgers, but effectively dealing with the primary factors in transmission such as animal movements and biosecurity.

Indiscriminate killing of large numbers of bovine TB-free badgers in Northern Ireland is not the answer to eradicating bovine TB. We will be scrutinising and responding to DAERA's consultation.



## About badgers

The badger is our largest land mammal and one of our most well-known species, fondly brought to life in classic children's books such as Mr Badger in Wind in the Willows and Tommy Brock in Beatrix Potter.

Badgers are one of our most valued species, protected by law, with over 25% of the European population found in the UK.

Badgers are famed for their black and white stripes and sturdy body, using their strong front paws to dig for food and to perfect their extensive hobbit-like burrows, called 'setts'.

Badgers are very sociable, living in large family groups (3-14 individuals) called 'clans' for many generations. A male badger is called a boar and a female a sow.

Young badger cubs are born in January or February, making their first appearance above ground in spring when it is a little warmer.

Badgers are nocturnal and emerge from the safety of their setts at dusk to feed. Their favourite food is juicy earthworms – they can eat several hundred per night! – alongside insects, berries, bird's eggs and small mammals. If you have badgers nearby, you can tempt them into your garden by leaving unsalted peanuts out - a tasty snack for our striped friends.

Badger society is tightly knit, and watching them socialise on their home turf before heading out for the night is fascinating – chatting, grooming, playing, fighting, and scratching together – and it's impossible not to start to get to know all the different characters in a badger family.

## Help stop the badger cull

If you feel strongly that healthy badgers shouldn't be killed as part of bovine TB eradication proposals made by the Department you can:

- **Sign our petition** - we've created an easy online petition to enable you to add your support to our call
- **Respond to the consultation** – we've outlined our key points for the consultation on our website — which you can refer to as you draft your own response. Closing date for responses is 10 September.

Visit [ulsterwildlife.org/badgers](https://ulsterwildlife.org/badgers) to take action now

# Help our Hedgehogs

The hedgehog is one of our favourite mammals in the UK and Ireland, and if you have ever seen one snuffling around your garden then you will know why. They used to be a familiar sight in our countryside and urban environment, but unfortunately they have declined owing to loss of habitat and food sources, tidy gardens, use of slug pellets, and the development of roads.

One of the biggest issues we face is a lack of information on their population numbers and how they are faring in Ireland, so we have teamed up with NUI Galway to carry out the Irish Hedgehog Survey in 2021 and 2022. Ulster Wildlife is leading the survey in Northern Ireland and you can take part this summer!

There are a number of ways you can get involved in the survey whether you have a small garden or larger space, as an individual or group, or have just seen a hedgehog.

- If you have a large garden, farm, or space you can carry out the full local area survey by placing out 10 footprint tunnels within a 1km<sup>2</sup> area over 5 nights. We can provide you or your group with a survey pack.
- If you have a smaller garden, you can survey for hedgehogs by making your very own footprint tunnel. This gets placed in your garden for 5 nights and checked each morning for footprints.
- Do you have your own camera trap? You can place this out instead of a footprint tunnel for 5 nights and see what garden visitors you have.
- If you've regularly seen a hedgehog in your garden, but don't want to carry out the survey, you can still complete our garden survey form to tell us a bit about your garden and how often you see hedgehogs.

## Gardening for hedgehogs

Like all wildlife, hedgehogs need food, shelter and water. The best way to provide them with food is by having a wild garden that attracts slugs, snails and beetles. You can also put out some hedgehog food if you think they need it. Hedgehogs are prone to dehydration, especially in summer, so a shallow dish of water is great. They will drink out of ponds, but make sure they have a way of getting out if they fall in!

Hedgehogs need a place to have their young and somewhere to hibernate in winter; a hedgehog house or a leaf pile is ideal. They also need to be able to move from garden to garden; a healthy hedgerow or a small gap in the bottom of a fence provides a perfect hedgehog highway.

## 10 Ways to Help Hedgehogs in your Garden

### 1 Choose plant species that are attractive to a range of insects

Have a look at the RHS Perfect for Pollinators list for suggestions: [rhs.org.uk/perfectforpollinators](https://www.rhs.org.uk/perfectforpollinators)



### 2 Mulch beds with garden compost

Encourages plenty of earthworms, woodlice and beetles as it begins to rot down!



### 3 Fallen leaf pile

Provides the perfect shelter for ground beetles.



### 4 Wood pile

Encourages a rich feast of earwigs, centipedes and woodlice!



### 6 Build a bug hotel

Stuff it with lots of straw and hollow plant stems and earwigs, centipedes, and woodlice will soon make it their home.



### 5 Allow a patch of grass to grow long

This will harbour lots of insects – a hedgehog's main food source.



### 7 Leave hollow plant stems over winter

The perfect hiding place for ladybirds!



### 8 Create nesting opportunities

Leave prunings and leaves in a wild corner for hedgehogs to make nests with. Hogs love apple and cherry leaves, and hawthorn and honeysuckle prunings make good structural supports.



### 9 Avoid pesticides

Ditch the slug pellets and avoid the use of pesticides. Hedgehogs are natural 'pest' controllers and need a plentiful and varied supply of invertebrates to stay healthy.



### 10 Create a hedgehog highway

Hedgehogs need to roam far and wide in search of food and mates, so get together with your neighbours to cut a 13cm x 13cm (5in) hole in your fence.

Find out more at [ulsterwildlife.org/hedgehogs](https://www.ulsterwildlife.org/hedgehogs). Happy hedgehog watching and don't forget to submit your results!

Wildlife doesn't recognise the boundaries of nature reserves. In fact, species such as yellowhammers largely depend on sustainable land-use practices in the wider landscape, such as provisioning of winter stubble for food and thick hedgerows for nesting.



# Mapping the path for Nature's Recovery in Northern Ireland

Nina Schönberg explains the key role that Nature Recovery Networks (NRNs) could play in achieving a more resilient and prosperous future, for both wildlife and people.

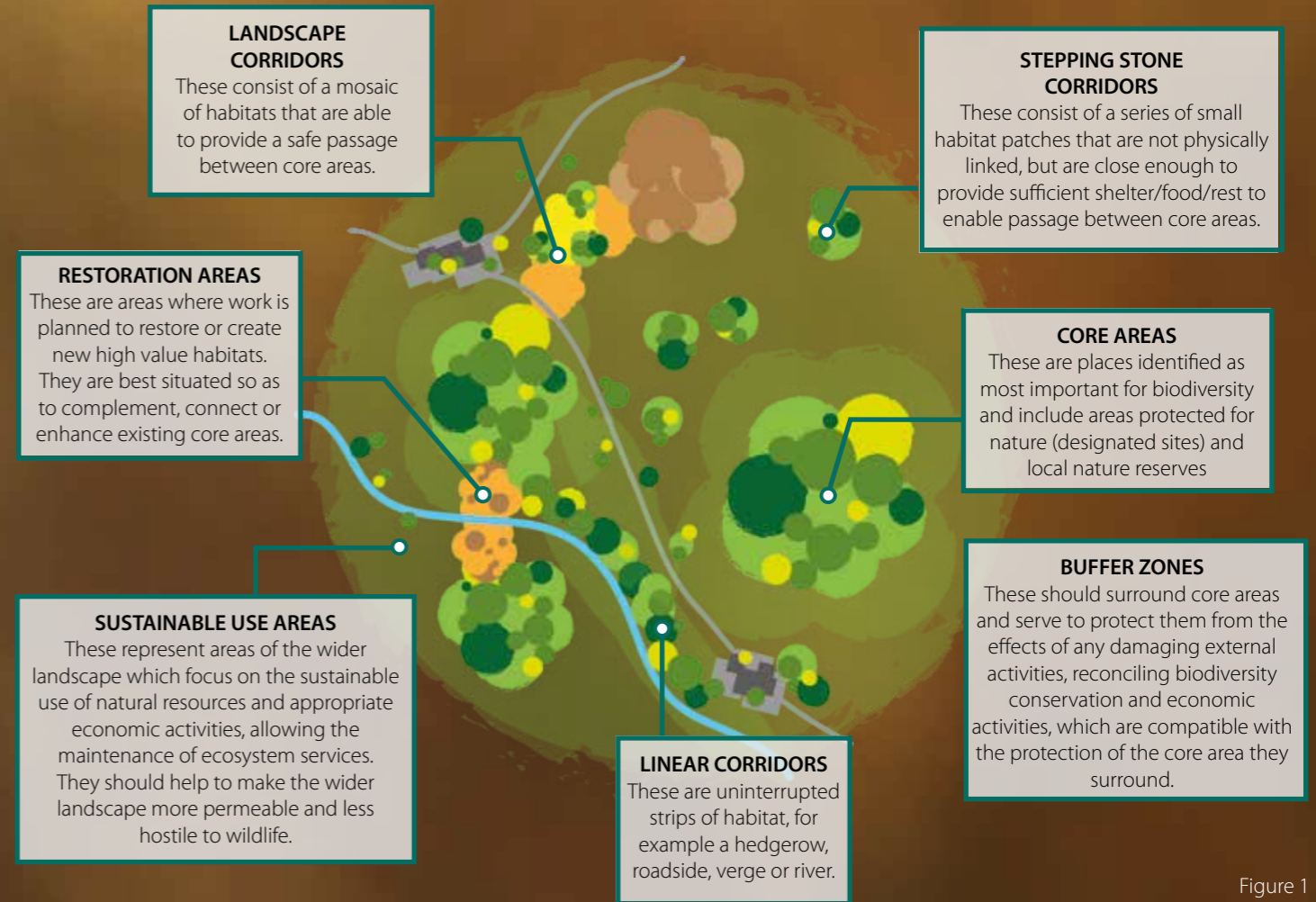


Figure 1

**“For nature to recover at scale in Northern Ireland, we need transformative solutions. Locally designed but nationally joined up Nature Networks could bring wildlife and the benefits of a healthy natural world into every part of our lives.”**

Sadly, we are currently living in one of the most nature-depleted places in the world, largely driven by habitat loss and fragmentation. At the same time, we are in a climate emergency, which is inextricably linked to biodiversity loss. To address both the climate and biodiversity crises requires a step-change in our approach from focusing solely on the conservation of isolated wild places, to actively putting nature into recovery across Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is currently setting its ambition post-Brexit and post-Covid. While the focus is to 'build back better', it is recognised that this also needs to be greener. 2021 marks the start of the UN 'Decade on Ecosystem Restoration', and when two major UN Conferences on Biodiversity and Climate will take place. These events will shape the post-2020 global plans for biodiversity and climate, and provide an opportunity to highlight what we need to do in Northern Ireland for the long-term wellbeing of both our environment and people.

**What are Nature Recovery Networks?**

The Lawton Report (Making Space for Nature) in 2010 set out that in order to achieve real change for nature we need to do things differently: we need to make spaces for nature that are 'More, Bigger, Better and more Joined-up'. This is essentially what a Nature Recovery Network is. It is a plan to stitch together and repair the broken and disconnected fabric of nature across a landscape.

**What we are doing in Northern Ireland**

The first step in creating a Nature Recovery Network for Northern Ireland is producing what are known as 'National Habitat Network' maps or 'Ecological Network' maps for a range of different habitats. Since September 2020, together with partners and key stakeholders, Ulster Wildlife has been working on a project to fast track the development of a Nature Recovery Network for Northern Ireland. This involves producing a first set of National Habitat Network maps, which will allow us to look at Northern Ireland

as a single biogeographical unit (while incorporating cross-border elements) – highlighting which areas are known to be important for wildlife and identifying where there could be potential to either restore or create habitats, and intentionally linking them up (see Figure 1). The vision is for these maps is to be used in decision-making by planners, agri-environment schemes, developers, conservation organisations, and land managers, to name a few.

**How Nature Recovery Networks can be brought to life**

In spring 2020, seven partners came together to create UK's first 'super' National Nature Reserve on Purbeck Heaths in Dorset. This new 'super' nature reserve combined three existing National Nature Reserves and land in between, totalling at 3,331 hectares, allowing species more ability to move across the landscape while also providing people the opportunity to enjoy it. While our own Nature Recovery Network might look

different, examples like this show how bringing together land, expertise, and a common vision from partners can aid nature's recovery at a landscape scale. Only approximately 10% of land in Northern Ireland is currently designated for nature protection, with up to 80% of these sites in poor condition. For this to change, we need new laws with binding targets for nature's recovery and a first Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland with a Nature Recovery Network at its heart.

Find out more at [ulsterwildlife.org/nature-recovery-networks](http://ulsterwildlife.org/nature-recovery-networks)



**Nina Schönberg** is the Nature Recovery Networks Project Coordinator and joined in 2020 after working in Scotland on species monitoring and conservation programmes.

**Nature Recovery Networks Partners**

In September 2020, with the aim of working together to protect and enhance biodiversity at a landscape scale, Ulster Wildlife, RSPB NI, the National Trust and the Woodland Trust joined forces on an 18-month capacity - building project around Nature Recovery Networks.

With generous funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the aim of the project is to put in place mechanisms and to advocate for the adoption of the Nature Recovery Network-approach into policy and practice in Northern Ireland, through mapping, case studies, and knowledge-sharing.

We ran our first set of webinars in April and you can watch them back here - [youtube.com/c/UlsterWildlife/videos](https://www.youtube.com/c/UlsterWildlife/videos)

# WILD NEWS

All the latest local news from Ulster Wildlife



Kelp forests store 20 times more CO<sub>2</sub> per acre than land-based forests.

## Vital role of our seas in fighting climate change

© BERNARD PICTON

A new report we recently commissioned shows the importance of Northern Ireland's coastal and marine habitats in helping to tackle the climate crisis and achieve net zero greenhouse targets.

'Blue Carbon Habitat Restoration in Northern Ireland Feasibility Study', developed in partnership with the National Oceanography Centre and the University of Hull, identifies what, where, and how much local coastal marine habitats, such as kelp forests, saltmarsh, seagrass meadows, and also shellfish, can capture and store carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere – these habitats are known as 'blue carbon'.

The role of woodlands and peatlands in carbon sequestration has been well known for some time, but marine equivalents have often been overlooked, despite the oceans absorbing nearly a third of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that human activity generates every year.

The report found that a significant proportion of the coastal blue carbon habitats occurs within Northern Ireland's inshore Marine Protected Area (MPA) network. This means there is a significant opportunity to protect these

carbon sinks by implementing effective MPA management plans. Through habitat restoration and creation, there is potential to triple the amount of carbon sequestered within the MPA network.

The bigger picture of blue carbon is one of coastal habitat conservation, especially given the drastic declines in these habitats. For example, every year up to 100 hectares of saltmarsh are lost in the UK. When these systems are damaged, for example by physical disturbance or poor water quality, an enormous amount of carbon is emitted, where it can then contribute to climate change – so protecting and restoring coastal habitats is important for limiting global warming and its related effects. The benefits also go far beyond carbon capture, as these habitats provide recreational opportunities, storm protection, and nursery habitats for commercial and recreational fisheries.

The report was funded by DAERA through the Challenge Fund.

 Download the full report at [ulsterwildlife.org/blue-carbon](https://ulsterwildlife.org/blue-carbon)

## Actions needed for Blue Carbon

To optimise the potential of blue carbon habitats, Ulster Wildlife is calling for:

**A blue carbon strategy** – a cross-cutting strategy that would underpin action to protect, restore, create and monitor blue carbon habitats.

**Increased data collection** and **comprehensive blue carbon accounting** to underpin the strategy.

**Conservation and enhancement of blue carbon habitats** most notably through Northern Ireland's Marine Plan and the MPA designation and management process.

**Identification of pilot projects for active habitat restoration**, including looking at the benefits of co-restoration (restoring two or more species in the same location, such as oyster beds and seagrass).

## Young People meet new DUP Leader



We were delighted to join the Duke of Edinburgh's Award staff and the new DUP Leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson to plant a tree in memory of The Duke of Edinburgh and the work he did with young people, from all backgrounds, through his Award.

Sir Jeffrey also took the time to meet with members of our Youth Forum to

discuss the environment and hear their views. The world is currently experiencing a climate and biodiversity emergency, so it is vital that young people have an opportunity to engage with these very relevant issues that will impact on the health and wellbeing of their own and future generations.

## Climate Bill update

The private member's Climate Change Bill, introduced by Clare Bailey MLA (Green Party), passed its second Assembly stage on 10th May, and is now at Committee stage.

There's widespread political support for the Bill's target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045; however, the agri-food industry has raised concerns about the impact on the sector. Minister Poots has now brought a DAERA Climate Change Bill to the Assembly. The DAERA Bill has a less stringent target of an 82% emissions reduction by 2050 compared to the private member's Bill – this is based on the UK Climate Change Committee's



evidence for an achievable pathway based on current economic structures. It also includes emissions reduction targets for 2030 and 2040.

## IN BRIEF

### Tribute to Ian Forsyth

We were deeply saddened to hear of the passing, in April this year, of Ian Forsyth. Both Ian and his late wife Dr Pamela Allen were life members of Ulster Wildlife and founding members of the Ulster Trust for Nature Conservation, as we were originally known, in 1978.

Ian and Pamela were deeply committed to nature conservation in Northern Ireland, regularly attended member events and made significant donations to our most urgent appeals.

As a member of the Belfast and Down Ringing Group, Ian was instrumental in making our Bog Meadows Reserve the longest running Constant Effort Site for bird ringing in Northern Ireland.

Ian's passion, enthusiasm, generosity, and knowledge made him an inspiration to so many of us here at Ulster Wildlife, and he will be greatly missed. We will celebrate the privilege of knowing and working with him.



### New youth environment curriculum

We are developing an accredited curriculum on environment and sustainability for children and young people, thanks to funding from the Education Authority Youth Service. This is an exciting opportunity to enable young people, in a non-formal setting, to learn more about the environment, create meaningful projects, and achieve an accredited award.





Trainees carrying out a wildflower meadow survey at Glenarm Nature Reserve

# Securing skills for a wilder future

Back in 2018, we welcomed our first group of trainees through the Nature Skills programme funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Our aim: to provide a range of passionate individuals with the essential skills and experience to pursue a career in nature conservation. Year-long placements were offered training alongside our Living Seas and Nature Reserves teams, giving trainees the chance to enjoy 12 months of practical hands-on learning, whilst working towards a Lantra Award. Additional funding enabled a range of training courses to be offered, and trainees received a bursary to help cover living costs.

In May 2021, our final trainees said their farewells bringing the programme to a close, but what a year to finish on! Our nine hopeful trainees started their journey in February 2020, two weeks before the world came to a standstill with COVID-19. We had to quickly turn the traineeship on its head: set up home working for everyone, conduct classroom

learning online, and implement social distancing amongst the group to allow everyone back out on site for the much anticipated practical experience and training.

Unfortunately, we lost a couple of trainees from the programme along the way, as circumstances of COVID-19 prevented them from continuing. However, we are delighted the remaining seven trainees stuck with us whilst we navigated our way through lockdowns and went on to successfully complete their year. Yes, some changes to the traineeship had to be made, and we are grateful to the funder for their flexibility and understanding throughout the year, granting us an extension of three months to ensure the trainees did not miss a season of learning in the world of conservation. We are pleased to say we still delivered a very productive year, with all trainees getting the same learning experience as that of previous years.

Over the last three years, 20 trainees completed the programme with over

half going straight into employment within the sector. They have gone away with numerous training certificates in everything from brush cutters and wood chippers to snorkel instructor and marine mammal monitoring, to name but a few. They have gained on-the-job experience in habitat management, biological monitoring, delivering education and events, and species ID. And they have trained alongside many of our project teams in Ulster Wildlife, as well as with other NGOs in the sector, widening their knowledge and building an invaluable network of contacts for the future.

There is no doubt that the traineeship programme brought many benefits. It helped trainees get a foothold within conservation employment, inspired and encouraged them to focus on their own areas of interest, and enabled Ulster Wildlife to develop as a training provider. It may be the end of this project, but it's the beginning of many new opportunities ahead.

- 192 applications were received for 21 posts over the three years of the programme. 44% of applicants were under 24 years of age, with 41% applying with no third level qualification.

- Project funding enabled over 30 accredited training courses to be delivered to the trainees, providing them with valuable certificates relative to requirements for conservation jobs.

- Ulster Wildlife staff delivered over 140 hours of in-house classroom training on the bespoke training programme awarded by Lantra. This provided the trainees with knowledge of habitat ID and management, species ID, and control of invasive species.



**Matthew Mellon**  
Ranger

I applied for the traineeship because it looked like a great way to get trained-up in the knowledge, skills, and experience that I'd need to get into the conservation sector. The end result was a stronger foundation when applying for jobs and attending interviews, and I was delighted to accept the ranger role that I am now doing. I can't thank everyone at Ulster Wildlife enough for all the ways they've helped me grow and learn throughout the traineeship.



**Erin McKeown**  
Sea Deep Project Officer at Ulster Wildlife

The practical skills I had the opportunity to experience throughout my traineeship, such as campaign management and biological surveying, undoubtedly helped me to gain my current role as Sea Deep Project Officer at Ulster Wildlife. Alongside this, my time on the traineeship opened my eyes to all other aspects of the conservation sector, increasing my respect for all those working within it and ensuring I gained lifelong friendships with those who, like myself, want to conserve our local wildlife and wild places.



**Aman Muttu**  
Northern Irish Officer for the Irish Whale & Dolphin Group (IWDG) and MMO consultancy

I would like to thank Ulster Wildlife and the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the traineeship opportunity. With all the time, training, and support during my traineeship, I am now in a position where I feel I am reaching my career goals, as the Northern Irish Officer for the IWDG and MMO consultancy. None of this would have been possible without support from Ulster Wildlife staff who were constantly thinking about ways to get us where we want to be. The traineeship has done that for me and I'll never forget it.



**Emer Morrison**  
Hawk Walks and Falconry NI

My year with Ulster Wildlife has been such an experience – from all of the training courses we were given the opportunity to go on, working on different projects such as peatland restoration, to completing a placement in bird ringing with Aidan Crean. I gained so many skill sets, experience, and confidence over the 12 months, and came away feeling definitely more employable within the heritage sector. In March 2021, I started work shadowing with Hawk Walks and Falconry NI, training to progress to deliver public events. I started my journey as a stay-at-home mum and progressed to an employable person within the conservation sector. A big thank-you to the funder for a fabulous programme.



**Sheila Lyons** coordinates traineeships and volunteering at Ulster Wildlife

- 20 trainees completed their traineeship year, with 55% of them progressing straight into employment within the conservation sector. Other trainees chose to pursue further relevant study and fine tune their skills or volunteer to develop further experience within the sector.



**Dr Peter McEvoy**

## Farming with nature

In Northern Ireland, over 75% of our land area is managed as farmland. As an industry, and a contributor to our landscape and biodiversity, its importance cannot be underestimated.

Many of our priority species and habitats are surviving (and a few are thriving), owing to a long history of extensive farming practices (low input, low output). The marsh fritillary butterfly, which is rare in a European context, has a stronghold in marginal farmland, where its food plant devil's bit scabious thrives. Without ongoing grazing, it would rapidly disappear.

Species not faring so well, such as curlew, also rely on extensive grazing on wet grassland to create tussocky nesting and foraging habitat. Working with farmers to deliver optimum breeding-wader habitat is one of the main ways to reverse its decline.

While extensively grazed marginal and upland areas represent our biggest resource of semi-natural habitat, habitat creation in lowland agricultural settings also contributes to the diversity of habitats required for our struggling wildlife. Arable field margins and hedgerows are included on the NI priority habitat list by virtue of their importance for seed-eating birds, small mammals, and predators such as the barn owl. Many small and isolated pockets of semi-natural woodland also occur on lowland farmland with potential for expansion through natural regeneration or planting.

Carbon reduction is a hot topic, and given the scale and economic importance of farming here, there is sensitivity around how emissions targets will impact the industry. Alongside potential biodiversity gains, there is also significant potential for carbon sequestration on farmland. Woodland, scrub, and hedgerows can store huge amounts of carbon annually, and surprisingly so too does unploughed grassland.



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However, it is the vast upland peatlands and lowland raised bogs where most carbon is stored. With appropriate management, all of these habitats can contribute to carbon offsetting.

As land managers, farmers are essential in securing a sustainable and biodiverse future, but like any industry, farming has to be profitable. Agri-environment schemes have proved a key tool in helping farmers achieve financial returns for managing habitats for wildlife, for almost 30 years. These schemes help farmers who struggle for profitability on marginal land, or compensate for the loss of production on more fertile land, where habitats have been created or allowed to expand.

The latest version available to farmers is the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) which provides payment in return for following habitat-specific 'prescriptions'. Recognising the importance of confident and skilled farmers in successfully delivering agri-environment measures, Ulster Wildlife has been running a DAERA-funded 'EFS Group' Programme for a number of years to assist farmers with their application to, and understanding of, EFS.

The 'Group' element also helps bring together neighbouring farmers who can deliver nature conservation at the landscape scale required for successful wildlife recovery with over 300 members, and has ambitious plans for further growth.

**Take action** If you're a farmer, why not sign up to EFS – [peter.mcevoy@ulsterwildlife.org](mailto:peter.mcevoy@ulsterwildlife.org). You can also help farmland wildlife from home: avoid using chemicals, let nature into your garden, and support local nature-friendly farmers.

**DR PETER MCEVOY** is our new Director of Land Management (EFS)

# FUNDRAISING FOR WILDLIFE

Want to get involved? Contact Vickie on 028 9693 5291



## Alpha Housing helps Let Nature In!

Alpha Housing residents and staff have launched an initiative to help reverse the decline in wildlife by creating nature-friendly gardens within its 40 sites across Northern Ireland.

As part of their commitment, Alpha have signed up to Ulster Wildlife's 'Let Nature In' campaign. Driven by tenants, who are deeply committed

to helping nature flourish across Alpha's sites, Alpha, as a significant landowner, believes that it is important for housing associations to play their part in reversing the frightening environmental decline.

Find out more [ulsterwildlife.org/news](http://ulsterwildlife.org/news)

## Donate while you shop

Do you shop online? While we would always encourage you to support and shop local, we know many people use



Amazon for online shopping. Why not let your online shopping support local nature conservation work?

Do you use the Amazon App? Setting up 'Ulster Wildlife Trust' as your chosen charity is easy, and Amazon will donate a portion of your eligible mobile app purchases to us.

1. Open the Amazon app on your phone
2. Select the main menu (=) & tap on "AmazonSmile" within Programmes & Features.
3. Select Ulster Wildlife Trust as your charity.
4. Follow the on-screen instructions to activate AmazonSmile.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Working for Wildlife

At the recent EGM an amendment to our articles was approved which removes the option of corporate membership as part of the fundraising suite. There are many ways your business can still work in partnership with us to create space for nature:



- Our Nature & Climate Fund – a way for your business to contribute to long-term conservation work through land management and acquisition.
  - Corporate volunteering on our nature reserves.
  - Improving your sites for biodiversity through site audits and training.
  - Making an annual donation to our appeals and conservation projects.
- Contact Vickie to find out more.

### Adopt an animal

Why not adopt one of four local species in need of your help? From barn owls to sharks, your adoption will help to transform their fortunes and support our species conservation work. You'll also get an adoption pack to gift [ulsterwildlife.org/adopt-an-animal](http://ulsterwildlife.org/adopt-an-animal)



### Share your Hare!

Once you have read your magazine, please give it to someone you think would like to support local nature conservation work. This simple act could help encourage your friends and family to become members of Ulster Wildlife.






# Let Nature In!

Share Your Garden

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Gardening for wildlife can have a huge impact for nature. Wildlife can thrive in gardens of all types, large and small.

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Sign up for **FREE** and find out more at  
[ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in](http://ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in)



*You Will Receive:*

**Monthly ezine**

**FREE let nature in guides**

**Exclusive talks & events**



**Ulster  
Wildlife**