

Collaborative Action for the Natura Network



Protecting habitats and species
across Ireland, Northern Ireland
and Scotland – 2017-22

Interreg 
Northern Ireland - Ireland - Scotland
European Regional Development Fund

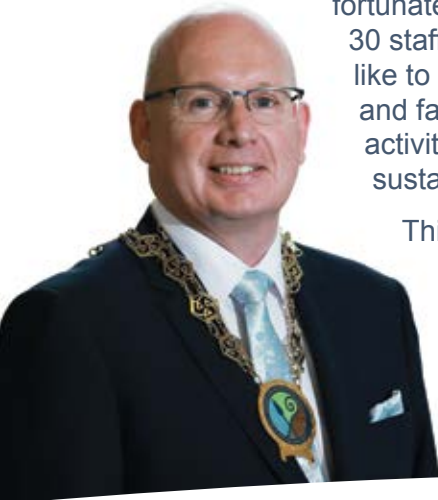
This project has been supported by the EU's
INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the
Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Welcome

On behalf of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, the lead partner in the CANN project, I am delighted to write a few words as a foreword to this lovely booklet. These pages celebrate the work that the CANN project team has delivered over the last six years, bridging borders to bring about environmental conservation and restoration.

This project has only been made possible because of financial support from the INTERREG VA programme. Match funding was also provided by the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government in Ireland, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland, and NatureScot in Scotland. We are indebted to our funders for their financial assistance and the support they continue to offer to our endeavours.

To be the lead partner in such a prestigious and successful partnership as the CANN project has demonstrated the skills and flexibility of our local authority in this central role. I am proud to see the successes of this project, bringing together diverse organisations, including charities, academic institutions and government departments from across Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Working together we can be stronger and more effective than working alone. Partnership working has been a crucial part of the CANN project, and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council would like to thank our ten project partners for their commitment to the project. We are fortunate to have had an extraordinarily skilled and highly experienced team of over 30 staff dedicated to the project, and we thank them for their efforts. I would also like to show appreciation to the other stakeholders, including local landholders and farmers, who have supported our conservation management and protection activities and are committed to working with our staff to develop environmentally sustainable practices in local communities.



This booklet is a real celebration of the project's successes, showing with simple, impactful infographics, gorgeous pictures, and personal quotes what CANN has achieved through a challenging time of lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic. I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I have, and I hope it inspires others to carry on CANN's work into the future.

Cllr Michael Savage, Chairperson, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council



A project supported by the European Union's INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

The views and opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission or the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).



CANN ran from 2017-2022 and was supported by the EU INTERREG VA programme, managed by the SEUPB with a total budget of €9.4 million.



35 staff employed across 11 project partners.

Detailed site mapping and ecological and environmental surveying providing baseline data for all bog and lake sites.

Standardised mapping and survey techniques developed.

Rapid site condition survey techniques trialled and developed.

Monitoring and evaluation techniques developed for all bog sites in NI and the RoI.

CANN – working for peatlands and wetlands

CANN was a cross-border conservation project to improve peatland and wetland habitats for wildlife and for people.

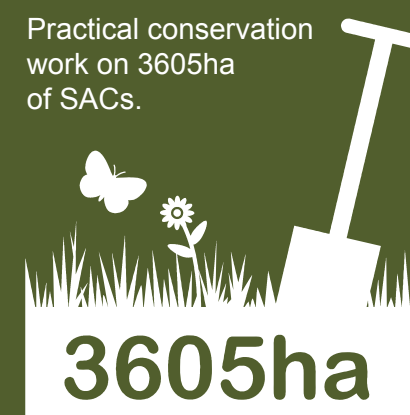
This booklet celebrates and summarizes the achievements of the eleven partners in the CANN Project, between 2016 and 2022.

CANN, Collaborative Action for the Natura Network, was an INTERREG VA project, one of 60 programmes across the European Union designed to promote greater levels of cross-border co-operation. CANN worked across Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland, liaising closely with landowners and land managers to improve the condition of over 25,000ha of internationally important wildlife sites. All the sites involved are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), designated by the European Union.

Eleven partner organisations worked together, carried out detailed ecological and hydrological research and prepared 26 Conservation Action Plans. They also undertook practical conservation actions from these plans to improve the condition of peatland and wetland SACs. CANN delivered citizen science and outreach activities to local communities and schools, co-ordinated training for staff and volunteers and shared best practice. CANN achieved key EU biodiversity targets, safeguarding the sites and ensuring their future.

"It's amazing to look at all the achievements of CANN! What seems like the end is really a new beginning."

Jennifer Fulton, Chief Executive Officer, Ulster Wildlife



26 Conservation Action Plans written for 26 SACs.

Species Action Plans for Hen Harrier, Corncrake, Redshank, Curlew, Lapwing, Snipe, Golden Plover and Red Grouse.

Standardisation of habitat and species action plans across the SACs.

Led by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

Cuilcagh Mountain and Cuilcagh-Anierin Uplands

Cuilcagh Mountain and Cuilcagh-Anierin Uplands Special Areas of Conservation straddle the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, in Counties Fermanagh, Cavan and Leitrim.

What's special about Cuilcagh Mountain and the Cuilcagh-Anierin Uplands?

Cuilcagh Mountain and the Cuilcagh-Anierin Uplands Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are part of a mountain range rising to 665m, the highest point in Fermanagh and Cavan. This cross-border site is one of the largest and most intact areas of blanket bog on the island of Ireland. The site's summits, slopes and cliffs boast a number of rare plants and the site has nesting Red Grouse and foraging Hen Harriers, as well as nationally important numbers of breeding Snipe.

CANN's work at Cuilcagh and Anierin SACs

CANN's conservation work included blocking drains to re-wet the bog, repairing eroded areas and controlling invasive species. Detailed ecological and geophysical surveys were undertaken across the 12,500ha site, to develop restoration plans for eroded bare peat and drained areas. Local landowners were trained in peatland restoration techniques. They installed hundreds of dams to block drains and restored vegetation on eroded bare peat. Cuilcagh Lakelands Global Geopark guides were trained in how to explain peatland restoration to visitors. A cross-border Wildfire Management Plan was produced with advice from world-leading experts. Invasive non-native conifers were removed, and conservation path work helped to reduce the impact of recreation on the sensitive montane heath.



Restoration work on eroded bog



Using wool to restore bare peat



Landowner restoring eroded bog

"It's amazing to see the work of CANN having a positive impact for habitats, species and local communities across Cuilcagh and Anierin after only a few years!"

"We're proud to have trained 3 local landowners to carry out peatland restoration on their own land."

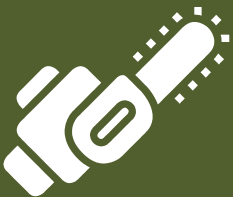
Roisin Grimes, Ulster Wildlife



Conservation path work using traditional techniques and local stone.

323 peat dams installed by the landowner to re-wet the bog.

17ha of restoration work repairing eroded gullies with 439 coir rolls and 1 tonne of heather brash.



842 invasive conifers removed, to improve 245ha of blanket bog.

Mapping of over 5200 invasive non-native conifers.

4 years of breeding bird surveys undertaken.



2 Conservation Action Plans, one for Northern Ireland and one for Ireland.

Cross-border Wildfire Management Plan developed.

Species Action Plans for key species at both SACs.

Survey of recreational impacts on sensitive habitats.

Monitoring of atmospheric nitrogen enrichment on 4 sensitive habitats.

LIDAR, high-res orthophotography, stereo colour infrared & 3D imagery of 12500ha.

Species identification swatches and interpretive panels.

Community Action group set up to carry CANN's work forward.

Sliabh Beagh

Sliabh Beagh Special Area of Conservation is a cross-border upland blanket bog in Northern Ireland and Ireland, in the Counties of Tyrone, Fermanagh and Monaghan.

What's special about Sliabh Beagh?

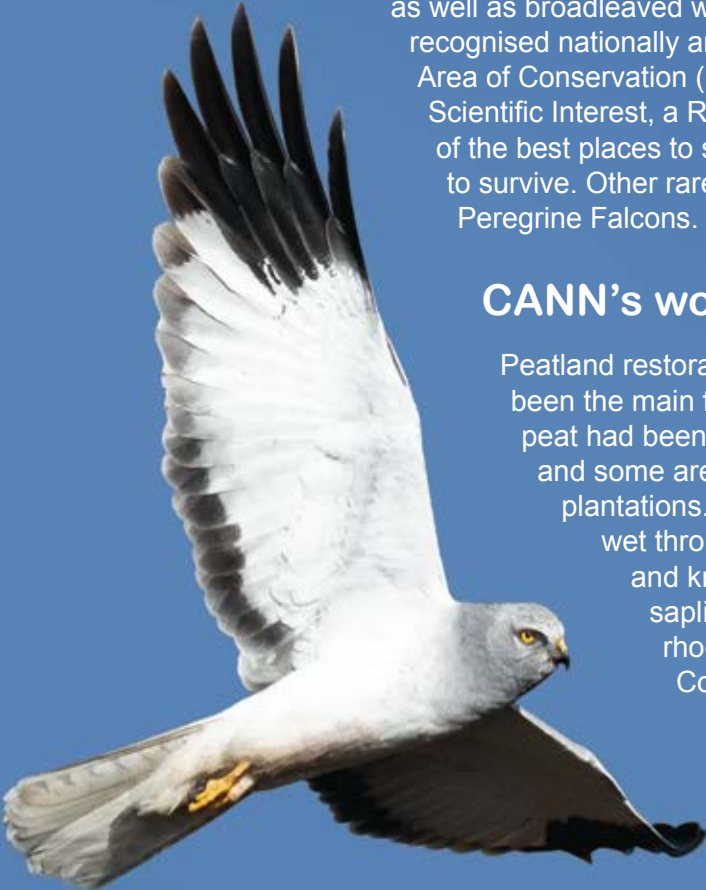
Sliabh Beagh is a large upland blanket bog, 12,391ha, home to rare and endangered animals and plants. It has a rich mosaic of wildlife habitats including upland blanket bog, wet and dry heathland, oligotrophic lakes, ponds and streams, as well as broadleaved woodland and conifer forests. Sliabh Beagh is recognised nationally and internationally for its biodiversity. It's a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a Special Protected Area, an Area of Special Scientific Interest, a Ramsar site and a Natural Heritage Area. It's also one of the best places to see Hen Harriers, which need these open habitats to survive. Other rare birds of prey live here too, including Merlins and Peregrine Falcons.

CANN's work at Sliabh Beagh

Peatland restoration, fire protection and habitat management have been the main focus of CANN's work at Sliabh Beagh. In the past, peat had been extracted from large areas of the upland bog, and some areas had been drained in preparation for conifer plantations. CANN blocked ditches and drains to keep the peat wet throughout the year, helping the bog mosses recolonise and knit the bog back together. Large areas of conifer saplings that had self-seeded throughout the bog and rhododendron were cleared away. Two comprehensive Conservation Action Plans were prepared to co-ordinate the management of Sliabh Beagh and protect it in the future. Historic fires were studied and modelled. An important Wildfire Management Plan was prepared for the entire site in conjunction with the fire services.

"The 'on the ground' conservation measures we carried out will have a major impact in the future in protecting Sliabh Beagh's blanket bog, helping to combat climate change. It's rewarding to see our work having an impact already - the blanket bog is wetter and the water table level in the drains has also increased."

Paul Sherlock, CANN Sliabh Beagh Conservation Assistant, Monaghan County Council



© David Dinsley

Hen Harrier



Curlew

Blocking drains to prevent bogs from drying out

© Tina Claffey

© Ronald Surgenor



1320+ peat dams installed over 125ha to block drains and ditches on Sliabh Beagh.



Invasive species removed from over 100ha of the bog.



500ha in grazing agreement for a small herd of Dexter cattle.



The conservation status of 1229ha improved.

Bird monitoring and nest protection undertaken annually over 6 years.



2 Conservation Action Plans produced for Sliabh Beagh, one for Northern Ireland and one for Ireland.

Species Action Plans for key species at both SACs.

Wildfire Management Plan produced, and a wildfire advisory group established.

Ammonia monitoring undertaken to collect data on air quality.

Regular stakeholder meetings and engagement activities, including school tours.

Eye Spy booklets produced for Sliabh Beagh and 1000 distributed.

Community Action group set up to carry CANN's work forward.

Isle of Islay

The Rinns of Islay and Eilean na Muice Duibhe are two Special Areas of Conservation on the Isle of Islay, off the west coast of Scotland.

What's special about the Rinns of Islay and Eilean na Muice Duibhe?

The Rinns of Islay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is made up of six sites across the Rinns peninsula on the west of Islay. They have a rich mosaic of habitats including maritime grassland, sea cliffs, scrub, wetlands, heath and blanket bog. The Rinns have one of the UK's largest populations of rare Marsh Fritillary butterflies.

Eilean na Muice Duibhe SAC, also known as Duich Moss, is an internationally important blanket bog in the centre of Islay. It has one of the biggest roost sites in the UK for Greenland White-fronted geese. It is designated as a Special Protection Area, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Ramsar site. Hen Harriers hunt at the Rinns and Duich Moss SACs.

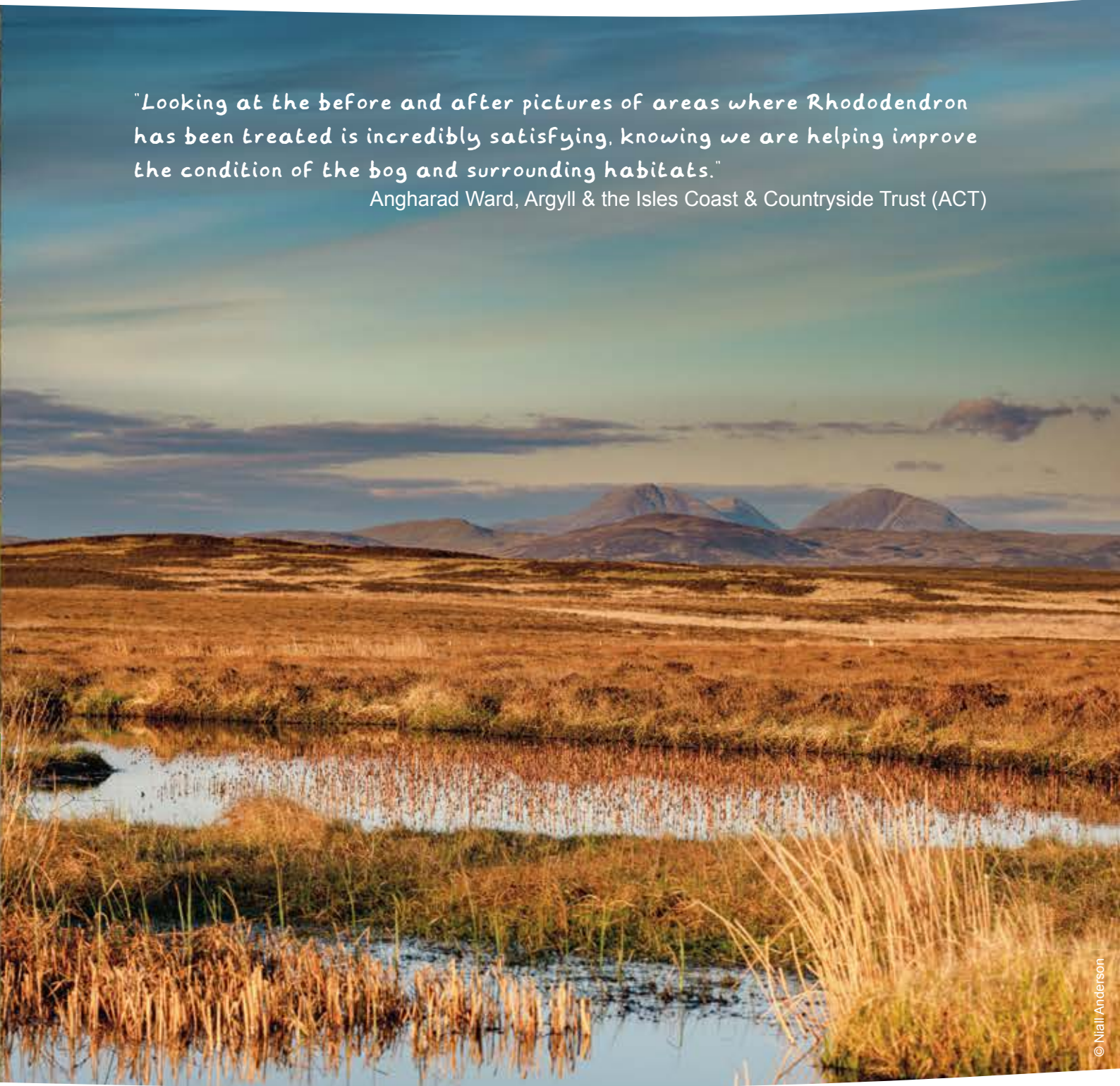
CANN's work on the Rinns of Islay and Eilean na Muice Duibhe

CANN partner, Argyll & the Isles Coast & Countryside Trust (ACT), undertook ecological monitoring and removed invasive plants from blanket bogs. They worked with the Islay Natural History Trust to monitor Hen Harriers and other breeding birds on the sites, and surveyed Marsh Fritillary butterflies. The project produced comprehensive Conservation Action Plans for both SACs and trained landowners and others in chainsaw and pesticide use.

Rhododendron and conifer saplings were taken out as their roots damage and dry out the bog. Clearing invasive plants needs to be done repeatedly to make sure all regrowth is removed. CANN also cleared Rhododendron on the neighbouring Isle of Colonsay.

"Looking at the before and after pictures of areas where Rhododendron has been treated is incredibly satisfying, knowing we are helping improve the condition of the bog and surrounding habitats."

Angharad Ward, Argyll & the Isles Coast & Countryside Trust (ACT)



© Tina Clafey

Volunteers cleared 118ha of conifer saplings



© Niall Anderson

Marsh Fritillary



© Tina Clafey

Removing young conifers



© Niall Anderson



130ha of land had Rhododendron removed over multiple years, to remove regrowth and seedlings.

118ha of land had conifer saplings removed over multiple years to remove regrowth and new seedlings.



2ha were planted with native trees.

1400m of deer fencing was installed to protect naturally regenerating woodland.



3 years of bird monitoring carried out on 6 sites.

3 years of Marsh Fritillary butterfly monitoring undertaken at 4 sites.

Conservation Action Plans were written for 2 SACs.

New colony of Irish Lady's Tresses orchids recorded near one of the Rinns of Islay SAC sites.

© Niall Anderson

Ecological survey work for CANN

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, the Golden Eagle Trust and Atlantic Technical University, Sligo, undertook mapping, ecological surveys, monitoring and evaluation at Special Area of Conservation sites in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Essential maps and data

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), the Golden Eagle Trust (GET) and Atlantic Technological University, Sligo, (ATU) provided essential maps and collected scientific data at CANN Special Area of Conservation (SAC) sites in Northern Ireland and Ireland. This enabled CANN to establish baseline information for each site to guide and inform site-specific actions during CANN and the preparation of all the Conservation Action Plans. The baseline data identified the key plant and animal species and enabled CANN to understand where and why these species were present. AFBI and GET developed and used best practice methodologies to provide detailed assessments of the sites' condition. Teams of experts assessed the sites during extensive fieldwork and used remote sensing information to identify threats and pressures.

Habitat and species mapping

Teams of ecologists undertook habitat surveys of SACs in Northern Ireland and Ireland using the European Nature Information System (EUNIS), the National Vegetation Classification (NVC), Phase I and Annex 1 approaches. The teams also carried out hydrological mapping and monitored ammonia deposition. Priority species were identified across the CANN sites. Surveys targeted multiple bird species, namely Hen Harrier, Corncrake, Red Grouse, Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew, Golden Plover and Redshank plus Marsh Fritillary butterflies. These priority species were surveyed and monitored at ten SAC sites by GET, working with local ornithologists, community groups, heritage groups, gun clubs and Citizen Scientists. GET also provided information and training alongside Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT). Information collected by AFBI, ACT and GET was shared among CANN partners and with statutory organisations.



"Behind every good CAP there's a good map."
Trish Fox, Ulster Wildlife

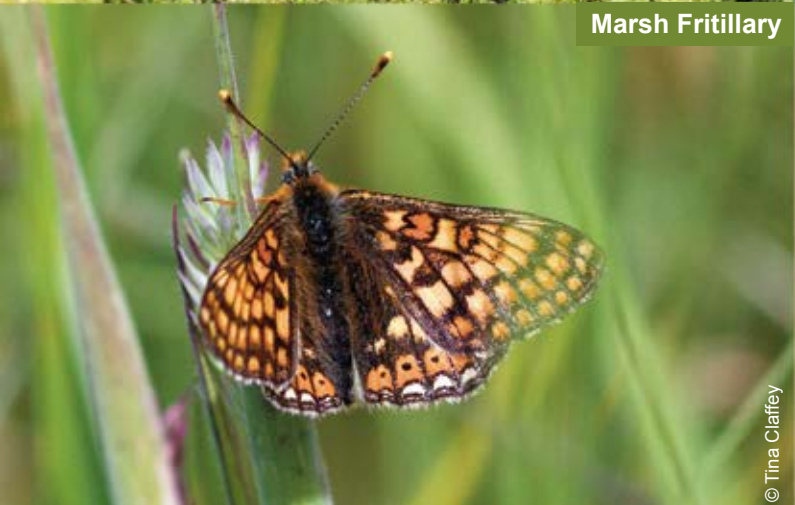
"If you build it, they will come. The restoration works carried out during the CANN project had detectable responses to site restoration. Snipe returned to breed on many of the lowland raised bogs during the project lifetime!"
Marc Ruddock, Golden Eagle Trust



Red Grouse



Curlew



Marsh Fritillary



Golden Plover



Baseline data collected for 26 SACs to guide Conservation Action Plans.
Condition of 13 SAC sites assessed and reported.

Habitat mapping according to EUNIS, NVC, Phase 1 and Annex 1 completed for 13 SAC sites.
Stereoscopic Infra-red (SCIR) mapping skills were developed, providing detailed maps down to the level of individual trees.

LIDAR (3-D laser scanning) was used to map some aquatic and terrestrial habitats.
Invasive scrub mapped at 13 SACs.
Priority bird and butterfly species monitored at 10 sites.



Populations of Hen Harrier monitored at Islay, Sliabh Beagh, Cuilcagh and lowland bogs in NI.

CANN's work on active raised bogs

CANN worked at eight active raised bogs that are Special Areas of Conservation sites in Northern Ireland.

What's special about CANN's raised bogs?

Active raised bogs are peatlands that have a functioning peat-forming ecosystem with many peat-building plants, such as Sphagnum mosses, Heather, Cotton-grass and Sundews. The CANN active raised bog sites are Garry Bog, Peatlands Park, Curran Bog, Moneygal Bog, Fairy Water Bogs, Tully Bog, Cranny Bogs and Ballynahone Bog. CANN's work at these Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) involved detailed ecological and hydrological monitoring and research, surveying and producing restoration and Conservation Action Plans. Practical conservation work included blocking drains to slow the flow of water off the bogs and installing new fencing to help manage livestock grazing. CANN also liaised with landowners and arranged events and activities including guided walks and talks.



"Blocking drains with both plastic dams and peat dams on such a large scale has definitely been the biggest achievement. Seeing the drains that were previously dry and desiccating the bog, completely full to the throat once the dams were installed is the most amazing thing. There is something so simple and satisfying about blocking the flow of water, and watching it rise."

"Weather was always a battle. Avoiding nesting bird season meant we often had to work in the wettest part of the year. When you are working with huge machinery on the softest ground imaginable, in wet weather, then heart-in-mouth moments are unfortunately a regular occurrence. We got 2 diggers, 2 tracked dumpers, 1 quad bike, and several people mired in the bog!"

Simon Gray, Senior Technical Officer, Ulster Wildlife

© Tina Claffey

What is a raised bog?

- 1 Raised bogs develop very slowly in shallow ponds or lakes.
- 2 Gradually they become covered with mosses and plants. Dead moss forms peat on the lake bed.
- 3 Eventually the lake is completely filled. The dense peat prevents surface plants from reaching the groundwater.
- 4 Sphagnum mosses become the main plants, as they can survive on rainwater, which has few nutrients. Dead sphagnum turns into more peat, gradually raising the bog into a large, shallow dome.



Over 1000 peat dams installed across six active raised bog SACs.

Over 1000 plastic piling dams installed across six active raised bog SACs.

Over 10km of new fencing installed to reduce livestock poaching on 6 sites.



Over 12ha of invasive self-seeded conifers and invasive scrub controlled on Moneygal and Tully Bog SACs.

Almost 20ha of Rhododendron controlled across 4 active raised bogs.

A year of ammonia deposition data collected across four active raised bogs.



Snipe recorded on borrow pits within a year of drain blocking.

Hydrological data collected and collated across over 150 dip wells, on 8 raised bog SACs, over three years.

Waste Rhododendron made into charcoal in a pilot project at Peatlands Park.



Large Heath butterfly recorded on all CANN raised bogs.

Marsh Fritillary butterfly recorded at Moneygal for the first time in 10 years.

Turmennan and Lecale Fens

Turmennan and Lecale Fens are two Special Areas of Conservation on the Lecale Peninsula in Northern Ireland with rare mire and fen wetland habitats.

What's special about Turmennan and Lecale Fens?

Turmennan Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is one of the best transition mires in Northern Ireland. It's a vital wetland habitat amongst the intensively farmed landscape of County Down. It's home to rare plants and animals, especially beetles and Marsh Fritillary butterflies.

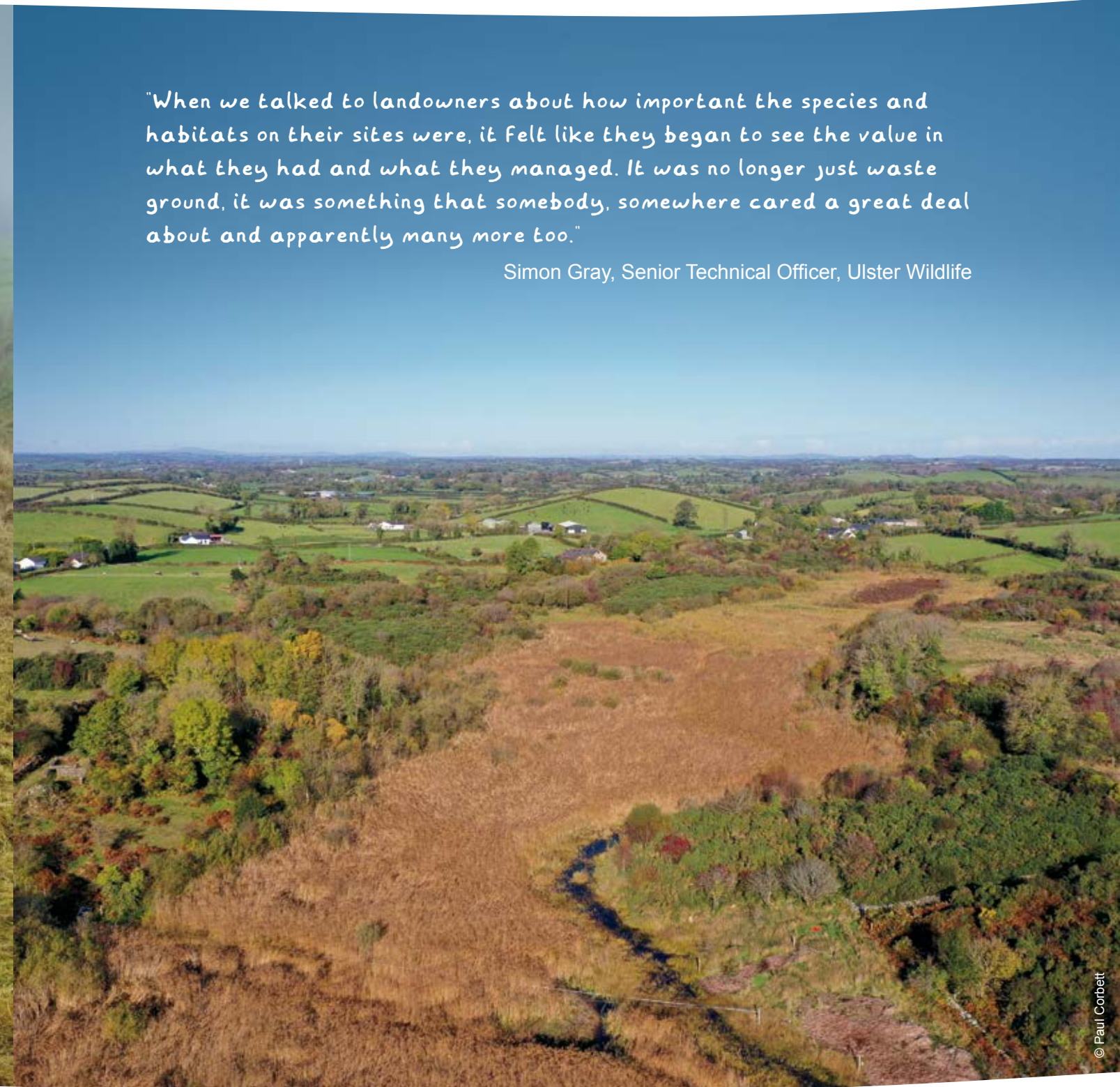
Four individual sites make up the Lecale Fens SAC, also in County Down. The fens have calcium-rich, or alkaline, soils that are permanently waterlogged, so specialised calcium-loving plants and animals that are rare in Northern Ireland can flourish here. Lecale Fens are famous for their rich insect life. They're also the only site in Northern Ireland where the tiny Desmoulin's Whorl snail is recorded.

CANN's work at Turmennan and Lecale Fens

The CANN Project undertook ecological surveys and research to help land managers to understand the complex hydrology of the two Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Practical conservation work included the removal of Rhododendron and other shrubs that were drying out the wetland soils. A remote-controlled flail machine was used to break down rank vegetation that livestock couldn't reach.

"When we talked to landowners about how important the species and habitats on their sites were, it felt like they began to see the value in what they had and what they managed. It was no longer just waste ground, it was something that somebody, somewhere cared a great deal about and apparently many more too."

Simon Gray, Senior Technical Officer, Ulster Wildlife



Over 4ha of Rhododendron control at two of the Lecale Fens.

Over 3ha of invasive scrub and reed control at 2 of the Lecale Fen sites.



Ecological surveying of Marsh Fritillary butterfly and other insects at Turmennan and the Lecale Fens, over two years.



General Species Action Plan created for priority bird species at both SACs.

Ammonia deposition data collected at Lecale Fens for one year.

Desmoulin's Whorl snail was discovered at Turmennan in 2018 – the first record in Northern Ireland.



Lough Arrow

Lough Arrow Special Area of Conservation is a large spring-fed lake in the Counties of Sligo and Roscommon, Ireland.

What's special about Lough Arrow?

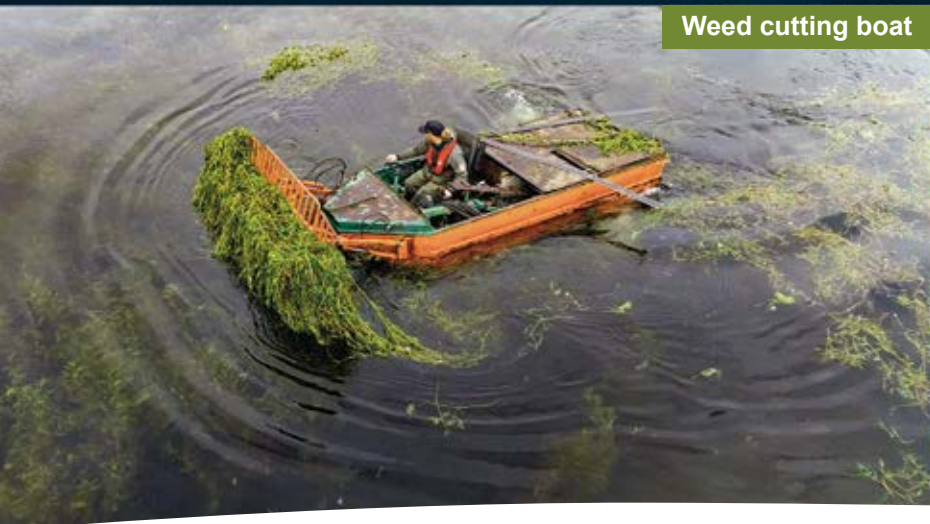
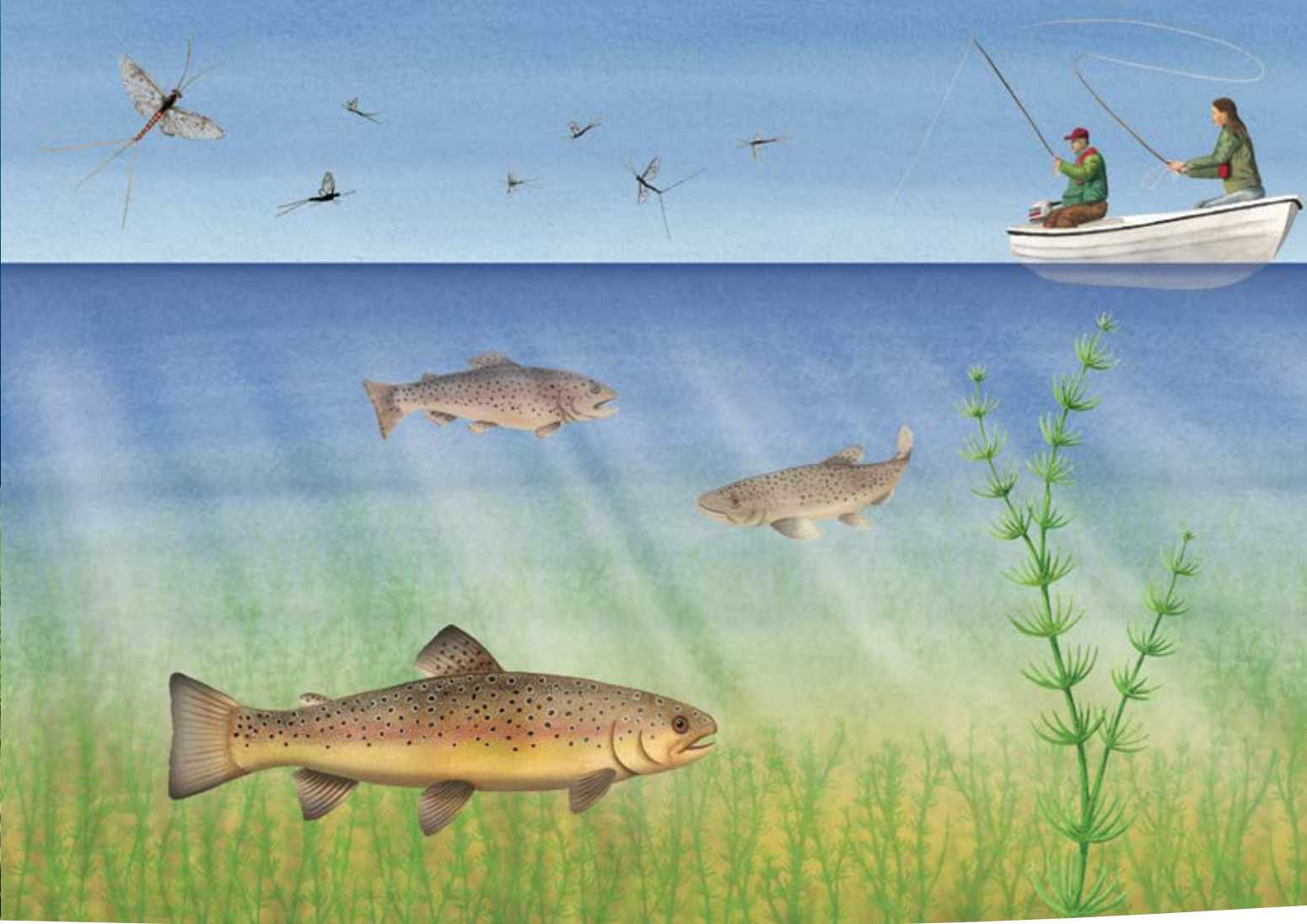
Fresh springs in the limestone lakebed produce clear 'hard' water that is calcium-rich, unpolluted and cool. The water has relatively low levels of nutrients, encouraging a diverse range of aquatic wildlife including Brown Trout and aquatic insects, underwater meadows of Charophytes (also known as Stoneworts), and reedbeds. Lough Arrow has the highest densities of breeding Great Crested Grebe, Merganser and Tufted Duck in western Ireland. Unlike many lakes in Ireland, Lough Arrow's nutrient levels have remained relatively stable over the last 40 years, making this a special waterbody on the island of Ireland. However, Nuttall's Waterweed (*Elodea nuttallii*) has recently spread into the lake, creating fast-growing, dense tangles of vegetation, shading out the delicate native Charophytes, or Stoneworts.

CANN's work at Lough Arrow

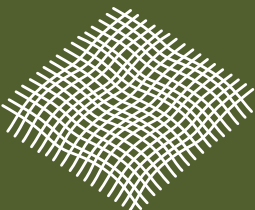
The CANN team, led by Atlantic Technological University Sligo engaged and involved anglers and other key stakeholders in conservation actions. CANN cut large areas of the invasive Nuttall's Waterweed, (*Elodea nuttallii*,) to conserve and promote the regeneration of native Charophytes. The team created Elodea-free corridors on the lake for fishing boats and produced interpretive panels and a waterproof leaflet encouraging anglers and other boat users to check, disinfect, clean and dry their equipment.

"Working on Lough Arrow as a CANN project site, was an excellent way for ATU Sligo to develop conservation actions for the lake. It was a pleasure to work on the management of *Elodea nuttallii* there and we hope the legacy of the biosecurity site will keep communities engaged in spread prevention of aquatic weeds. The lake is close to our University, so it will keep communities engaged in preventing the spread of aquatic weeds."

Professor Frances Lucy, Head of Department of Environmental Science, Atlantic Technological University, Sligo



Weed cutting boat



Jute matting, a benthic geotextile, used to create bio-secure weed-free corridors allowing fishing boats to access the lake.

Elodea nuttallii removal from several sites in Lough Arrow.

Reduction of over 90% of *Elodea nuttallii* growth following clearance in key areas.



Charophyte surveys and regeneration of these plants in areas covered by jute matting.

Multiple stakeholder meetings with landowners and anglers.

Biosecurity training to prevent the spread of invasive species.

Biosecurity site provided at Lough Arrow with treatment box, interpretive panels and leaflets.

Magheraveely Marl Loughs and Kilroosky Lough Cluster

Magheraveely Marl Loughs and Kilroosky Lough Cluster Special Areas of Conservation contain small freshwater lakes and wetlands that straddle the Northern Ireland and Ireland border in Counties Fermanagh and Monaghan.

What's special about Magheraveely Marl Loughs and Kilroosky Lough Cluster?

These are 'marl' loughs, known for their crystal-clear water and lake beds of clay and limestone gravel. Groundwater-fed by calcium-rich springs, the lakes are a rare 'hard-water' habitat with endangered White-clawed Crayfish and extensive, underwater meadows of Charophyte plants, known as Stoneworts. The lough margins are diverse with sedges and other wetland plants. The lakes' water quality has deteriorated in the last 50 years due to pollution from nearby agricultural land and houses. The Special Area of Conservation (SAC) loughs are Knockballymore (North, South and Middle), Dummy's, Kilroosky (Horseshoe and Little Kilroosky), Burdautien, Summerhill, Ramages, Annachullion, Drumacrittin and Black Lough.

CANN's work at Magheraveely Marl Loughs and Kilroosky Lough Cluster

Surveys and laboratory experiments were needed to understand and protect the loughs' fragile ecosystems. The lakes currently have unnaturally high levels of phosphorus, which encourages excessive growth of aquatic algae and pollution-tolerant plants. It also depletes deep-water oxygen during summer. CANN worked with Ulster University and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute to research the origin and amount of phosphorus in the lake sediment and its impact on the lakes' ecology. The researchers investigated how phosphorus release from the sediments could be reduced. They also undertook crayfish and aquatic plant surveys.

"Here every lake has its own unique personality. The most rewarding part was the collaboration with project partners."

Dr Joerg Arnscheidt, School of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Ulster University



Trapping Crayfish



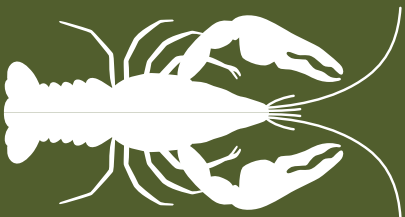
White-clawed Crayfish



Laboratory analysis



Charophyte meadow in a hard-water lake



9 lakes surveyed for water depth, water quality and crayfish populations.

All lakes surveyed for aquatic plants.

4 lakes surveyed for groundwater sources using new radon-tracking technology.

Mitigation options investigated for limiting phosphorus release from sediment.

Invasive Zebra Mussel documented at one lake system.

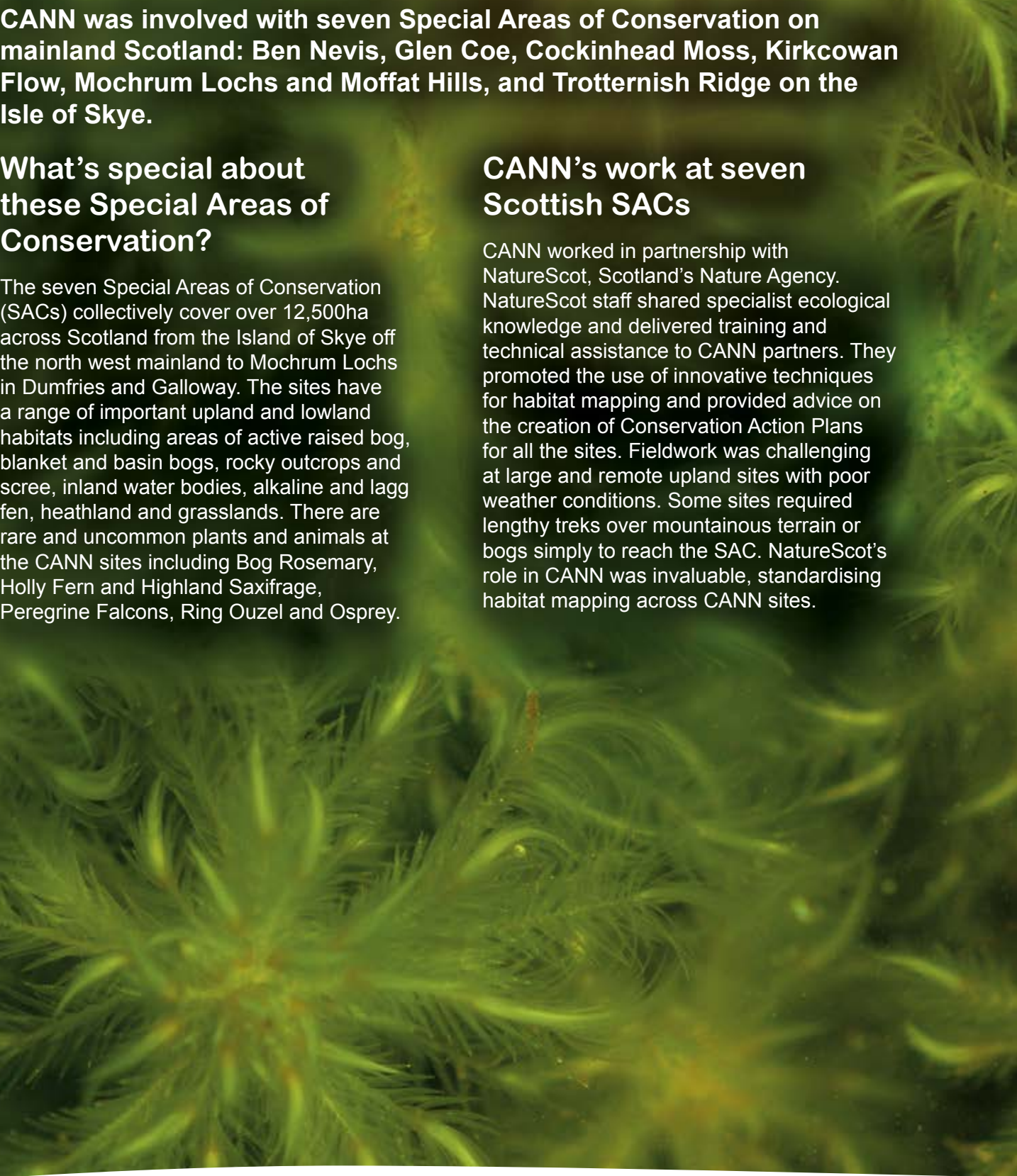
Pollution sources tracked using genetic markers at 2 lakes.

Wetland habitats and vegetation mapped at all lakes.



Conservation Action Plans produced for all SACs.

Special Areas of Conservation on seven Scottish uplands



CANN was involved with seven Special Areas of Conservation on mainland Scotland: Ben Nevis, Glen Coe, Cockinhead Moss, Kirkcowan Flow, Mochrum Lochs and Moffat Hills, and Trotternish Ridge on the Isle of Skye.

What’s special about these Special Areas of Conservation?

The seven Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) collectively cover over 12,500ha across Scotland from the Island of Skye off the north west mainland to Mochrum Lochs in Dumfries and Galloway. The sites have a range of important upland and lowland habitats including areas of active raised bog, blanket and basin bogs, rocky outcrops and scree, inland water bodies, alkaline and lagg fen, heathland and grasslands. There are rare and uncommon plants and animals at the CANN sites including Bog Rosemary, Holly Fern and Highland Saxifrage, Peregrine Falcons, Ring Ouzel and Osprey.

CANN’s work at seven Scottish SACs

CANN worked in partnership with NatureScot, Scotland’s Nature Agency. NatureScot staff shared specialist ecological knowledge and delivered training and technical assistance to CANN partners. They promoted the use of innovative techniques for habitat mapping and provided advice on the creation of Conservation Action Plans for all the sites. Fieldwork was challenging at large and remote upland sites with poor weather conditions. Some sites required lengthy treks over mountainous terrain or bogs simply to reach the SAC. NatureScot’s role in CANN was invaluable, standardising habitat mapping across CANN sites.



“The CANN project provided us with a unique opportunity to apply and further refine innovative habitat mapping techniques developed during the previous Upland Management Pilot Project, over a range of different SACs, delivering new EUNIS/Annex 1 maps at a level of detail and accuracy unprecedented in Scotland.”

John Kerr, Operations Manager, Protected Areas Innovation and Data, NatureScot

Golden Plover

Habitat mapping for 1267.8ha.

Conservation Action Plans for the 7 SACs.

Produced detailed European Nature Information System (EUNIS)/Annex 1 habitat maps for 6 SACs - Trotternish Ridge, Ben Nevis, Glen Coe, Cockinhead Moss, Kirkcowan Flow, Mochrum Lochs.

Running and promoting the CANN project

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's role

The CANN Project was led by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) which managed this innovative cross-border project, making sure it ran smoothly throughout its six years and achieved its ambitious objectives. NMDDC had responsibility for the day-to-day management, administration and co-ordination of the project and ensured the delivery of the work plans. The council set up effective project governance structures and maintained open lines of communication between partners.

East Border Region's role

East Border Region's (EBR) role at the outset of the project involved analysing the SEUPB Programme call, facilitating meetings of relevant partners, identifying priorities and partners and encouraging cross-border co-operation. During implementation, EBR provided an advisory role for each partner, facilitated training on INTERREG VA rules, reviewed all procurement documents for partners, gave advice on communications and publicity and verified 100% of expenditure.

Communications and outreach

Communications and outreach work was co-ordinated throughout the project by NMDDC. This work included:

- Designing and maintaining the CANN website.
- Running an active Twitter feed and contributing to other feeds.
- Running a YouTube channel.
- Producing regular press releases for local, national and international media.
- Liaising with TV, Radio and Podcast providers to raise the profile of CANN.
- Researching and producing biannual newsletters between 2018 and 2022.
- Developing promotional materials such as leaflets, booklets, postcards and displays.
- Delivering three conferences showcasing CANN's work and providing training.
- Organising community events at CANN project sites.
- Organising workshops and seminars.
- Commissioning a video to show the work of CANN.
- Winner of the All Ireland Community Council Awards, 2020.
- Finalist in the EU-wide Innovation in Politics Award, 2021.

"EBR has extensive experience in all of the INTERREG programmes to date and bring this unique expertise to the CANN Partnership. This has significantly reduced the risk to the Lead Partner, and Project Partners by providing an overseeing and compliance role in relation to EU Funding which included prior approval of expenditure to ensure eligibility.
Pamela Arthurs, CEO
East Border Region



Covid-19

The Covid-19 Pandemic affected the work of the project, limiting some practical activities and restricting engagement events and face-to-face training sessions. However, it also brought unexpected benefits, as many of the online training sessions attracted expert presenters and new participants from many parts of the world including India, Australia, Argentina and Borneo.



1600 Followers on Twitter,
over 500 tweets.

500,000 Tweet impressions.

8 biannual newsletters.

Video of the project's work.

Leaflets, postcards and pull-up displays.

Wildlife guide publication for Sliabh Beagh,
with two reprints.

Wildlife 'swatch guide' for Cuilcagh and
Anierin.

Waterproof leaflet for anglers at Lough Arrow.

Interpretation panels at over 20 sites.

16 community events.

5 capacity-building and awareness-raising
seminars.

15 workshops – face-to-face and online.

Creating a conservation legacy for CANN

A legacy of skills and knowledge

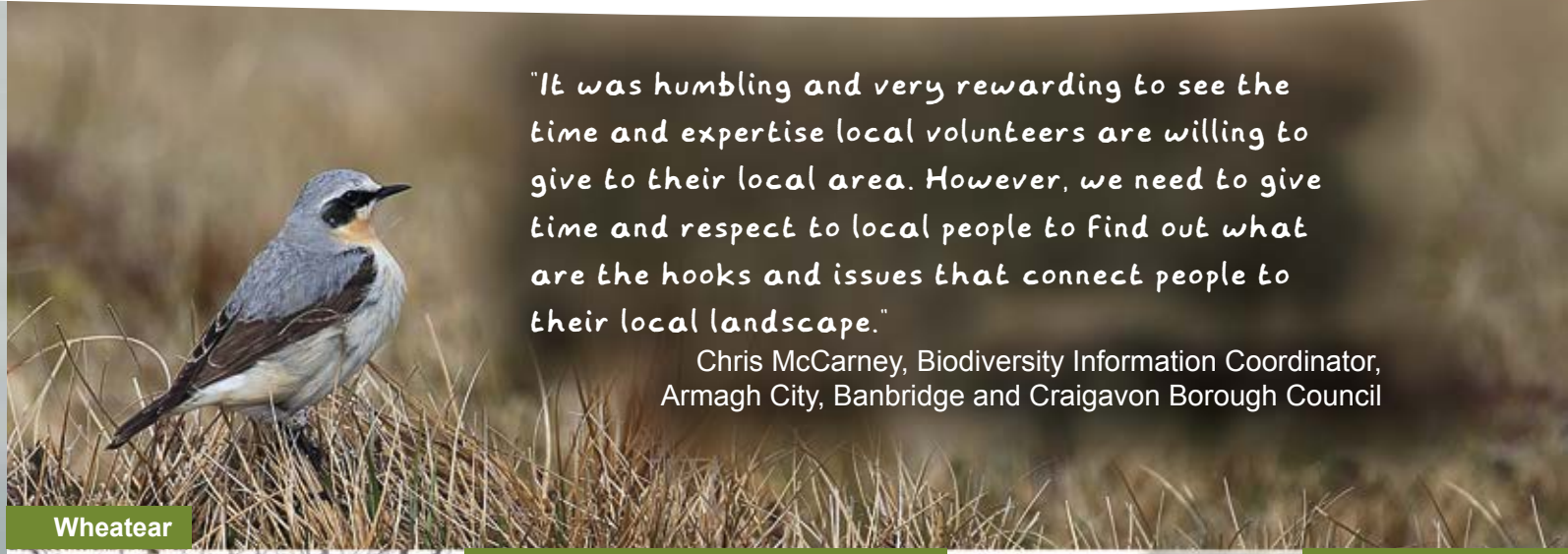
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABC) aimed to leave a legacy for the CANN project and facilitate organisations to share knowledge and skills across the three jurisdictions of Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland.

New community groups looking after their environment

ABC Council is particularly proud of the fact that the local people of Cuilcagh, Sliabh Beagh and Peatlands Park have made a commitment to establish new constituted groups to continue the conservation work on these CANN sites. These groups are also interested in joining the Community Wetlands Forum which is a network of community and volunteer organisations making a practical contribution to their local environment in the Republic of Ireland. This is a solid and real outcome of the networking and exchange visit to the Republic of Ireland.



Chainsaw training



Wheatear

"It was humbling and very rewarding to see the time and expertise local volunteers are willing to give to their local area. However, we need to give time and respect to local people to find out what are the hooks and issues that connect people to their local landscape."

Chris McCarney, Biodiversity Information Coordinator, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council



Volunteers clearing Rhododendron

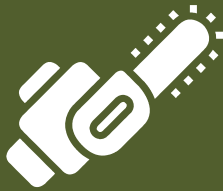


Bird box painting



3 Citizen Science Projects established that will be sustained by volunteers after CANN project completed.

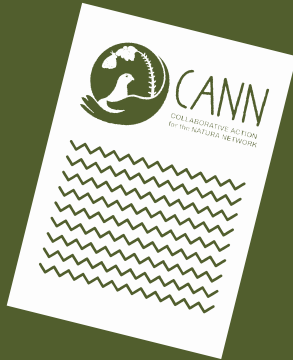
20 volunteers participated in 4 different courses to enable them to make a contribution to the conservation of the sites after INTERREG funding ceases.



4 landowners trained in safe operation of a chainsaw.

7 CANN staff trained in technical skills required to deliver the overall CANN programme.

3 networking and best practice trips attended by 33 people.



A paper on legislation research to help CANN influence government policy.

6 videos and factsheets to describe lessons learned from CANN.

Community displays to illustrate conservation work of CANN and illustrate best practice.

3 books to illustrate the work of CANN at Cuilcagh, Sliabh Beagh and Lough Arrow and issue a call to action by local people to sustain the conservation work started by CANN.

Guardian Structures established for the CANN sites – Sliabh Beagh, Peatlands Park, Cuilcagh, Lough Arrow and Islay.

Looking back over the CANN Project

The CANN project successfully achieved its targets and leaves an impressive legacy of tangible and intangible benefits for 26 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland. All the SACs moved towards favourable condition and CANN raised awareness of the importance of peatlands and wetlands, winning hearts and minds in local and national communities.

Practical action and scientific research

CANN improved over 3605ha of peatlands and wetlands, making these sites more resilient to adverse pressures. Bogs were re-wetted and invasive shrubs and trees cleared. Invasive waterweeds were removed from loughs and pollution sources identified at lakes, mires and fens. Accurate, detailed and up-to-date scientific records and mapping was undertaken at 26 SACs, providing essential, standardised baseline data that informed the preparation of Conservation Action Plans to guide the sites' management now and in the future. The approach to habitat and species action plans was also standardised across all CANN partners.

CANN worked for wildlife and people

These positive changes on the ground are matched by significant long-lasting benefits for people and for wildlife. CANN has forged strong and successful working relationships between landowners, land managers, academic institutions and conservation charities which will benefit future joint projects.

An important legacy

Staff and volunteers from many organisations have developed new skills and knowledge in scientific, ecological and practical land management, sharing these with others across borders, and benefitting everyone involved. Landowners and communities have become more aware of the significance of peatlands, and many are now actively involved in caring for their local sites and understand the importance of peatlands in preserving biodiversity, reducing flooding and ensuring safe drinking water. At a global scale CANN has helped to mitigate the effects of climate change as peatlands are the world's largest terrestrial carbon store.

"Talking to the land managers and other stakeholders helped us understand better their aspirations and the constraints they face in managing the SACs."

John Kerr, Operations Manager, Protected Areas Innovation and Data, NatureScot

"The majority of our contractors came from Argyll. We are proud to have created jobs and opportunities for small businesses in our county."

Deb Baker, Islay Site Co-ordinator, Argyll & the Isles Coast & Countryside Trust (ACT)

"When a bog is drained, its lifeblood seeps away, we were providing first aid for Sliabh Beagh, using peat dams to heal the peat itself, stitching the edges of the wounds together."

Paul Sherlock, CANN, Sliabh Beagh Conservation Assistant, Monaghan County Council





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