

Ahascragh

Nature & Wildlife Plan

2013-2016



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Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government



people & nature

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Photos: Janice Fuller

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Introduction

Ahascragh

Ahascragh is a lovely village in east Galway, 12km north-west of Ballinasloe. It is situated within a gently rolling landscape with a mix of agricultural land, raised bogs, wetland, woodland and forestry. Ahascragh (Áth Eascrach) means ford of the esker or sandy ridge. These small ridges form part of the Esker Riada, which is a series of ridges stretching from Dublin to Galway across the midlands. The Bunowen River flows through the village and a mill stream that was constructed off the river once powered a large corn mill. The old mill is still one of the dominant features in the village with its fine stonework.



Biodiversity Action Plans

Biodiversity Action Plans provide a framework for protecting, managing and/or enhancing natural heritage in the area through action led by the local community. The process of producing such a plan creates an opportunity to co-ordinate action among local groups, individuals, statutory bodies, and other organisations.

Many towns and villages, like Ahascragh, have active community-based groups such as Tidy Towns, schools, farming organisations, heritage groups etc. that work tirelessly for the benefit of their members and the community. The production of a local biodiversity action plan can help ensure that community-based projects will not have a negative impact on biodiversity, and may have positive impacts on nature,

the natural environment and amenities in the area e.g. through raising awareness, habitat creation and/or appropriate habitat management.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of all living things- plants, animals, microbes and fungi. Biodiversity also refers to the places where plants and animals live (habitats), and the complex interactions among living things (the web of life), and their relationship with the environment (ecology).

The natural world (i.e. biodiversity) provides us with many essential ‘goods and services’ – clean air and water, food, fuel, building materials, fertile soils, nutrient recycling, pollination, pest and disease control, medicines etc.

Biodiversity has many benefits for local communities by providing natural recreational amenities (e.g. parks and green spaces, walking and biking routes, picnic spots, places for fishing and angling), local educational resources and environmental protection. Allowing room for nature and wildlife in our towns and villages makes them more attractive and interesting, protects our environment, and improves our quality of life.

Process to produce the plan

Ahascragh was selected as one of nine towns and villages in east Galway to produce a community biodiversity plan in 2013. The project was funded by the Leader Company, Galway Rural Development. Dr. Janice Fuller, Consultant Ecologist, facilitated the production of the plan. Three public meetings were held in early 2013 to identify potential projects, events and/or activities that would have some nature and wildlife component and that might be included in the plan. The final plan produced builds on existing projects and initiatives that aim to protect and enhance nature, the environment and natural amenities in the town, and includes some new projects.

Biodiversity Training was provided for interested individuals and groups in Ahascragh in order to raise awareness of what biodiversity is, why it is important, where it is, and the many benefits of biodiversity for people, communities and the environment. The focus of the training was to produce a Biodiversity Plan for the town.

Residents from Ahascragh and the surrounding area met on three occasions with ecologist, Dr Janice Fuller (Appendix 1). Dr Fuller provided the training and facilitated the production of the Biodiversity Plan. The objectives and actions of the plan were decided by the local community.

Various agencies and environmental organisations were consulted as the plan was developed in order to learn more about biodiversity in the Ahascragh area.

The project to produce a local Biodiversity Action Plan for Ahascragh was a collaborative effort between Galway County Council, Galway Rural Development, People and Nature Project, Galway County Heritage Forum, Galway County Biodiversity Steering Group and the local community. The project to produce local Biodiversity Action Plans is an action in the County Galway Biodiversity Action Plan 2008- 2013, which is part of the Galway County Heritage Plan 2009- 2014. It was initiated by the Galway County Heritage Forum and the Galway County Biodiversity Steering Group, in partnership with Galway Rural Development.

Nature and Wildlife in Ahascragh

Ahascragh is situated in a gently rolling landscape with farmland, hedgerows, bog, woodland, rivers and callows. The **Bunowen River** flows through Ahascragh Village, with a man-made millstream leaving the river just north of the village and re-joining it again south of the village. The River is part of an EU project that aims to improve the conservation status of migratory fish such as the Atlantic Salmon. The River Bunowen is known for good brown trout populations and historically supported a salmon fishery. Rivers and streams are great places for wildlife, especially aquatic life, birds and small mammals such as otters.

There is an extensive area of **callow grasslands** north of the village and on either side of the Bunowen River. Callows are a very special type of wet grassland or meadow that occur in floodplains of rivers and lakes, and are seasonally flooded. They are composed of tall grasses and herbs such as reed canary grass, meadowsweet, ragged robin, yellow flag iris and various sedges and rushes. These wet grassy places provide wonderful nesting and foraging habitats for many birds, and are often teeming with insects and snails.



Callow grassland

There are a number of small **raised bogs** in the wider landscape around Ahascragh (e.g. at Cornamuckla and Fairfield). Raised bogs have particularly interesting vegetation as the plants that grow there have to cope with the wet and acidic conditions on the peat. The rich mix of heathers, sedges, mosses and liverworts often found on bogs produce colourful tapestries on the landscape. Heather provides excellent cover for rare nesting birds such as curlew and red grouse. One of our most distinctly Irish habitats, bogs are an important part of our cultural and natural heritage.

‘**The Avenue**’, as it is known locally, was originally the entrance to Castlegar House. Nowadays it forms a beautiful walking route with tall, mature trees, and woodland flora and fauna. The Coillte property, **Clonbrock woodland**, just north of Ahascragh village, is also a popular natural amenity for walkers. Even though it has been planted with conifers, many magnificent, huge oak trees still stand in Clonbrock, which appears to have a long history of woodland cover. Trees and woodland provide wonderful habitat for wildlife such as red squirrels, pine marten, bats and a multitude birds.

The long distance walking route, the **Hymany Way**, passes close to Ahascragh. The Hymany Way is part of the much longer Beara Breifne Way. It passes through beautiful landscapes and provides access for walkers to the countryside.



Hymany Way signage at Clonbrock Woodland

Community Action

Ahascragh Tidy Towns first entered the competition in 2010, which gave the committee the incentive to enhance the village. The streetscapes were given a fresh and clean appearance, areas were landscaped, and derelict sites enhanced. In 2011 they entered the competition again and won the endeavor award in Galway (the most improved entrant in a County). On entering again in 2012 they decided to enter one of the special awards- "Best Bring Bank Award"- and won the regional Best Bring Bank Award. They also won the Endeavour award for a second year running. The Tidy Towns Group is fortunate to have a great FÁS scheme, which works extremely hard maintaining and enhancing the village. The Group plan to continue with the Tidy Towns work, for the benefit of the village, local community and the environment.



A **Community Garden** was established in 2013. There are multiple plots on the site that people can rent for planting fruit and vegetables. The garden, which is a wonderful asset for the local community, has many biodiversity friendly features including compost bins, native trees and shrubs, and flower planting.

Ahascragh Nature and Wildlife Plan

	Project/ action	Project leader	Project partners	Time-frame
1	Enter the Golden Mile Competition <i>Celebrate the built, cultural and natural heritage along a mile of road</i>	Golden Mile Sub-committee	Local residents, Tidy Towns, TÚS, Galway County Council	2013
2	Install, maintain and monitor bird and bat boxes	Tidy Towns	FÁS, TÚS	Annually
3	Organise nature walks and talks (e.g. birds, bats, beekeeping, medicinal herbs etc.)	Tidy Towns	Biodiversity Project Manager, Heritage Officer	Annually
4	Create butterfly gardens and wildflower meadow in village	Tidy Towns	Biodiversity Project Manager	2013-2014
5	Community Garden- incorporate wildlife-friendly features <i>Community gardens provide an opportunity for learning together, enhancing local wildlife and creating a beautiful community space.</i>	Lily and Joe	FÁS, TÚS	2013-ongoing
6	Promote nature projects in local schools: e.g. bug hotel, nature walk, sunflower patch, veggie garden etc. <i>Nature-based projects provide excellent learning opportunities for children</i>	Tidy Towns	Biodiversity Project Manager, An Taisce	Lifetime of plan
7	Prepare habitat map of village and environs	Tidy Towns	Biodiversity Project Manager	2014

8	Run Annual Spring Clean <i>Litter looks bad, causes pollution and is a threat to wildlife</i>	Tidy Towns	Schools, Galway County Council, An Taisce	Annually
9	Plant native trees and shrubs in and around village; develop tree planting plan	Tidy Towns	Galway County Council	Annually- Tree Week
10	Develop interpretive heritage signage- upgrade existing sign at the grotto and erect signage with information on local heritage in village and environs (built, cultural and natural)	Tidy Towns	Galway County Council, GRD, Heritage Officer, Biodiversity Project Manager	2014- 2015

GRD = Galway Rural Development

Monitoring and Evaluation

A local group will be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the ‘Ahascragh Nature and Wildlife Plan’. They will meet at least twice a year in order to set annual goals and to review progress to date. The committee will liaise with the Galway County Heritage Officer and the Galway County Biodiversity Project Manager.

Funding sources

Potential sources of funding that could assist with implementing actions in the plan include the following:

Fund/ Funding Body	Description
Galway Rural Development	This leader company offers full and part funding for a variety of community-led projects. Discuss potential projects with the Community Development Workers prior to submitting applications to determine if they meet the GRD criteria for projects.
The Heritage Council	The Heritage Council offer grants to community groups and individuals for heritage projects most years. The deadline for applications is usually in November but this can change. See their website for details of the grant application criteria and application process (www.heritagecouncil.ie)
Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund, Galway County Council	This fund is administered by the Environment Section of Galway County Council; it promotes sustainable development by assisting small scale, non-profit environmental projects at a local level. (www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment/CommunityInitiatives/LocalAgenda21/)
Community Grant Scheme, Galway County Council	The objective of the Community Grant Scheme is to promote interest, education, knowledge and pride in, and to facilitate appreciate and enjoyment of the heritage of County Galway. Applications are invited once a year, usually in the Spring. (www.galway.ie/en/Services/Heritage/HeritageGrants/)
County Galway Biodiversity Project	The County Galway Biodiversity Project Manager, Elaine O’Riordan, applies for funding to wide range of funding bodies and organisations; community groups access this funding for biodiversity-related projects by contacting her directly. She will also assist groups with funding applications. (E-mail elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie)

Funding sources contd.

Environment Fund for Biodiversity Awareness Grant Scheme 2013	This grant was first offered in 2013. The main aim of the grant is to raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. It is administered through the Biodiversity Policy Unit of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. For more information contact: biodiversitypolicy@ahg.gov.ie
Foras na Gaeilge	Foras na Gaeilge provide funding for signage, booklets etc. that include some use of the Irish language. For more information see www.gaeilge.ie .

Biodiversity resources

Table 1: Useful contacts

Name (Group/ Individual)	Activities/ Expertise	Contact details
Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, Galway County Council	All matters relating to heritage	mmannion@galwaycoco.ie www.galwaycountyheritage.com (091) 509198
Elaine O’Riordan, Galway County Biodiversity Project Manager	Biodiversity, natural heritage, habitat mapping, community- based projects, biodiversity guidelines for community groups	elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie www.galwaycountybiodiversity.com (091) 495921
National Parks and Wildlife Service	Responsible for the protection of Ireland’s natural heritage, particularly sites designated as Special Conservation Areas, Special Protection Areas, Natural Heritage Areas, and Nature Reserves etc., and species of conservation concern e.g. hen harriers.	Wildlife Ranger: John Higgins john.higgins@ahg.gov.ie
Galway Bat Group	Organise walks and talks on bats in Galway	galwaybatgroup@gmail.com
Vincent Wildlife Trust	Promote conservation of bats and other mammals; provide information and advice; organise walks and talks on bats	katemcaney@vwt.org.uk www.mammals-in-ireland.ie/
BirdWatch Galway	Promote conservation of birds and their habitats; conduct surveys and organise birdwatching events in Galway	www.galwaybirdwatch.org

Table 2: Contacts/ information sources for implementing the Ahascragh Nature and Wildlife Plan

Action	Topic/ Activity	Information source
1	Golden Mile Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Officer, Biodiversity Project Manager (contact details above) • www.galway.ie/en/Services/Heritage/GoldenMile/
2	Bird and bat boxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.birdwatchireland.ie/Default.aspx?tabid=270 • www.batconservationireland.org/pubs/reports/Leaflet_3_bat_boxes.pdf
3	Nature walks and talks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Officer, Biodiversity Project Manager (contact details above)
4	Butterfly gardens and wildflower meadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.butterflyconservation.ie/wordpress/?page_id=33 • www.rhs.org.uk/Gardening/Sustainable-gardening/Plants-for-pollinators • www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/wildlifegarden/
5	Community Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.giyinternational.org/profiles/details/414/pages/pages/grow_the_giy_magazine
6	School nature projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.greenschoolsireland.org/_fileupload/biodiversity%20resources/Insect%20Hotel%20Habitat.pdf • www.rte.ie/radio/mooneygoeswild/factsheets/naturegarden/
7	Habitat map of village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.greenschoolsireland.org/_fileupload/biodiversity%20resources/Habitat_mapping.pdf
8	Annual Spring Clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.antaisce.ie • www.galway.ie/environment
9	Planting native trees and shrubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/heritage/pdfs/buds_of_the_banner.pdf • www.treecouncil.com
10	Interpretive signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.failteireland.ie/Market-Your-Business-With-Failte-Ireland/Expand-Your-Marketing-Toolkit/Attract-Cultural-Tourists.aspx • E.g. Rinville Park, Oranmore • E.g. BurrenLIFE (www.burrenlife.com)

Appendix 1: List of participants in biodiversity training to develop biodiversity plan for Ahascragh

	Name
1	Padraig Murray
2	Danielle Burns
3	Ann Marie Faulkner
4	Siobhan Fitzgerald
5	Ann Marie Braithewaite
6	Sharron Finnerty
7	Joe Finnerty
8	Noel Geraghty
9	Aidan Corr
10	Connie Burke
11	Mary Glynn
12	Pat Garr
13	Thomas Kelly
14	Ann Marie Brennan
15	Lily Frisby