

# Ballygar Nature & Wildlife Plan

## 2013-2016



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



**Text:** Dr Janice Fuller

**Photos:** Nuala McDonagh and Janice Fuller

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Ballygar .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Biodiversity Action Plans .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Process to produce the plan .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Nature and Wildlife in Ballygar .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Community Action.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Ballygar Nature and Wildlife Plan.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Funding sources .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Biodiversity resources.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix 1: List of participants.....</b>	<b>18</b>

# Introduction

## Ballygar

Ballygar is a small and attractive town in north-east Galway, near the Galway-Roscommon border. It was established as a Market Town in 1820 by the landlord of the time, Denis Henry Kelly (1797 – 1877). The town has an impressive Main Street, High Street and Market Square and also a smaller Church Square/Street at the end of the town. There is a rich built, cultural and natural heritage in Ballygar and the surrounding area, of which the local community is very proud.



The *Ballygar Nature and Wildlife Plan* sets out a list of projects, events and activities that will run over the next three years in the Ballygar area for the benefit of nature and wildlife, the environment, and the local community. This document is a ‘Biodiversity Action Plan’ for the Ballygar area.

## 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 Ballygar, 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 systems, pollination of plants including many crops, control of pests and diseases, 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**

Ballygar 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 late 2012 and 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 Ballygar 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 Ballygar 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.



*A biodiversity training session in Ballygar*

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

The project to produce a local Biodiversity Action Plan for Ballygar 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 Ballygar**

Ballygar is situated in a gently rolling landscape with farmland, bog, woodland, river and lake. The River Suck is a defining feature to the east, forming the boundary with County Roscommon. There are many places and habitats in and around Ballygar where nature and wildlife thrive.

### **Aghrane Wood**

This beautiful Coillte property can be accessed just off the centre of Ballygar Town and provides a wonderful natural amenity for the people of Ballygar and visitors alike. Formally part of the Castlekelly Estate, the woodland is a mix of conifer plantation and broadleaves. A network of paths runs through the woods providing excellent walking routes and opportunities for exploring. Woodlands tends to be havens for wildlife because they are relatively undisturbed and provide a range of habitats for small mammals such as red squirrels, badgers and bats, birds, and a multitude of invertebrates.



*Aghrane Forest*

### **Ballygar Bog**

Ballygar Bog is a small raised bog just north of Ballygar Town, which has a range of bog habitats including heathery hummocks, wet mossy hollows, pools and wet woodland. Raised bogs are a rare and threatened habitat internationally. They have a fascinating flora because bog plants have to be able to cope with the nutrient-poor, acidic and waterlogged substrate (peat). Insect-eating plants such as sundew, ling heather, cross-leaved heath, bog cotton, bog cranberry, bog rosemary and a whole suite of mosses and liverworts can be seen on Ballygar Bog. Raised bogs also provide invaluable habitat for birds such as Skylark, Curlew and Snipe. One of our most distinctively Irish habitats, bogs also have a rich cultural heritage.



*Sundew, an insect-eating plant*



*Ling heather*

### **River Suck**

The River Suck flows c. 2km east of the town centre. Much of the callowland along the Suck has been designated as a Special Protection Area due to the important populations of waterfowl such as Greenland White-Fronted Geese, Whooper Swan, Wigeon and Lapwing that utilise this invaluable habitat. Callows are a type of grassland that occurs in river floodplains. The rich alluvial soils in these areas allow for lush growth of tall grasses and herbs. The long grass provides excellent cover for nesting birds and the rich invertebrate flora that occurs in wetlands provides an abundant food source for birds, frogs and mammals such as otters.



There is a Wildfowl Sanctuary at Muckanagh, near where the River Shiven flows into the River Suck, and where waterfowl can be seen in large numbers, especially in winter. Rivers are wonderful places for wildlife because they act like wildlife corridors allowing animals to move through the landscape, especially where there is a wetland fringe such as callow grassland along the banks of the river.

### **Walking routes**

There are a couple of excellent long-distance walking routes that run through Ballygar and provide excellent access to the countryside and the rich natural heritage of the area. The Hymany Way is one of eleven sections of the Beara Breifne Way that travels from Portumna to Ballygar (see [www.irishtrails.ie/trail/Hymany-Way/382/](http://www.irishtrails.ie/trail/Hymany-Way/382/) for maps). The River Suck Valley starts and finishes in Ballygar (see [www.suckvalleywaywalk.ie/](http://www.suckvalleywaywalk.ie/) for maps).

### **Farmland**

Ballygar is a rural town surrounded by farmland with a rich mosaic of fields, hedgerows, stone walls, forestry, bog and wetland. Nature and wildlife thrive in the quieter corners, along hedgerows and on the more marginal land.

## **Community Action**

### **Tidy Towns**

The current Ballygar Tidy Towns committee was founded in February 2012. The committee organise weekly clean-ups throughout the year (bi-weekly during the summer months) that involve up to thirty committed volunteers. The work carried out includes litter control, general cleaning, painting, landscaping, development of wildlife amenities, promotion and protection of local heritage and the promotion of waste minimisation. In 2012, for the first time in over a decade, Ballygar entered the National Tidy Towns competition and scored impressively in a number of the different categories. It is hoped that in the years to come Ballygar Tidy Towns will strive to accomplish great things and foster an even stronger sense of pride in the local community.



*Annual Spring Clean in Ballygar, 2013*



*Planting trees during Tree Week 2013*



*Working on the newly created Wildlife Garden*

### **Schools**

The Secondary School in Ballygar, Coláiste Mhuire, has been participating in the Green Schools programme since 2003. They have received four flags to date and are currently working on the Biodiversity Theme. Ballaghlea National School, Ballygar is also in the Green Schools and they received their Biodiversity Flag in 2013.

### **Ballygar and District Gun Club**

Ballygar and District Gun Club has been in existence in the area for over thirty years and has been instrumental in the promotion and conservation of wildlife. The Club actively engages in vermin control programmes to promote and protect game bird, song bird populations and other wildlife in the local area. The Club regularly promotes and enhances local game stocks with pheasant releases and the planting of game crops.

## Ballygar Nature and Wildlife Plan

Action	Project/ activity/ event	Project leader	Project Partners	Timeframe
1	<p>Run nature walks and talks every year e.g. nature walk on the bog walk, woodland walk during Tree Week, bird-watching talk etc.;</p> <p><i>Walks and talks help raise awareness of the rich biodiversity and natural heritage of the local area</i></p>	Tidy Towns	Coillte, GCC, Biodiversity Project Manager	Tree Week, Heritage Week and Biodiversity Week
2	<p>Develop and maintain Community Wildlife Garden;</p> <p><i>Community wildlife gardens provide an opportunity for learning together, enhancing local wildlife and creating a beautiful community space.</i></p>	Tidy Towns, Plunkett Park Residents	GCC, GRD	2013
3	<p>Develop interpretive heritage signage for Ballygar and environs (e.g. linking village centre, Bird Sanctuary at Muckanagh, Aghrane Woods, Suck Valley and Hymany Ways etc.); include heritage information on Ballygar website</p>	Tidy Towns	GRD, GCC, Coillte, Birdwatching Group, Gun Club, Heritage Officer	2015
4	<p>Record local field and place names;</p> <p><i>Local field and place names often reflect local natural heritage features and past land use</i></p>	Heritage Society Tidy Towns	GCC, Heritage Officer	2014-2016
5	<p>Plant native trees and shrubs in and around village; develop three-year tree planting plan</p>	Tidy Towns	GCC	2014

6	Promote and support Greenschools programme in local schools;  <i>The Greenschools programme is an environmental education programme that has several themes including biodiversity</i>	Schools	Tidy Towns, An Taisce, GCC	Ongoing
7	Develop School Garden with composting units;  <i>School gardens provide an excellent learning opportunity and enhance the learning environment in the school grounds for children</i>	Ballygar National School	Tidy Towns, GCC	2013
8	Enter Golden Mile Competition;  <i>Celebrate the built, cultural and natural heritage along a mile of road</i>	Tidy Towns	Local residents	2014
9	Run Annual Spring Clean;  <i>Litter looks bad, causes pollution and is a threat to wildlife</i>	Tidy Towns	GCC, An Taisce	Annual
10	Develop way-marked looped trails in Aghrane Woods (with interpretive signage- Action 3);	Tidy Towns	Coillte, GCC, GRD	2014-2016
11	Erect, maintain and monitor bird nesting boxes and bat boxes in and around the town	Tidy Towns	Galway Bat Group, Vincent Wildlife Trust, GCC, BirdWatch Galway	Annual

GCC = Galway County Council; GRD = Galway Rural Development



## Monitoring and Evaluation

A committee will be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the ‘Ballygar 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:

<b>Fund/ Funding Body</b>	<b>Description</b>
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 ( <a href="http://www.heritagecouncil.ie">www.heritagecouncil.ie</a> )
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. ( <a href="http://www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment/CommunityInitiatives/LocalAgenda21/">www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment/CommunityInitiatives/LocalAgenda21/</a> )
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. ( <a href="http://www.galway.ie/en/Services/Heritage/HeritageGrants/">www.galway.ie/en/Services/Heritage/HeritageGrants/</a> )

*Funding sources contd.*

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 <a href="mailto:elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie">elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie</a> )
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: <a href="mailto:biodiversitypolicy@ahg.gov.ie">biodiversitypolicy@ahg.gov.ie</a>

## Biodiversity resources

**Table 1: Useful contacts**

<b>Name (Group/ Individual)</b>	<b>Activities/ Expertise</b>	<b>Contact details</b>
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 Ballygar Nature and Wildlife Plan**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Topic/ Activity</b>	<b>Information source</b>
1	Nature walks and talks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heritage Officer, Biodiversity Project Manager, Galway Bat Group, Vincent Wildlife Trust (contact details Table 1)</li> </ul>
2	Wildlife gardening (planting for butterflies and other pollinators, insect hotels, gardening for wildlife)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.butterflyconservation.ie/wordpress/?page_id=33">www.butterflyconservation.ie/wordpress/?page_id=33</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.rhs.org.uk/Gardening/Sustainable-gardening/Plants-for-pollinators">www.rhs.org.uk/Gardening/Sustainable-gardening/Plants-for-pollinators</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.greenschoolsireland.org/_fileupload/biodiversity%20resources/Insect%20Hotel%20Habitat.pdf">www.greenschoolsireland.org/_fileupload/biodiversity%20resources/Insect%20Hotel%20Habitat.pdf</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.rte.ie/radio/mooneygoeswild/factsheets/naturegarden/">www.rte.ie/radio/mooneygoeswild/factsheets/naturegarden/</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/gardening/wildlife-friendly_garden.aspx">www.rspb.org.uk/advice/gardening/wildlife-friendly_garden.aspx</a></li> </ul>
3	Interactive heritage signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heritage Officer, Biodiversity Project Manager (contact details Table 1)</li> </ul>
4	Field name recording	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heritage Officer (contact details Table 1)</li> </ul>
5	Planting native trees and shrubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/heritage/pdfs/buds_of_the_banner.pdf">www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/heritage/pdfs/buds_of_the_banner.pdf</a></li> </ul>
6	Green Schools programme-biodiversity theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.greenschoolsireland.org/resources/biodiversity.217.html">www.greenschoolsireland.org/resources/biodiversity.217.html</a></li> </ul>
7	Composting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment/WasteManagementRecyclingandWastePrevention/Composting/">www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment/WasteManagementRecyclingandWastePrevention/Composting/</a></li> </ul>
8	Golden Mile Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heritage Officer (contact details Table 1)</li> </ul>
9	Annual Spring Clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment">www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.antisce.ie">www.antisce.ie</a></li> </ul>
10	Waymarked looped trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.coillteoutdoors.ie">www.coillteoutdoors.ie</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.noticenature.ie/Walking_Trails_in_Ireland.html">www.noticenature.ie/Walking_Trails_in_Ireland.html</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Publications/Management_Standards.pdf">www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Publications/Management_Standards.pdf</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Publications/Trail_Development/Guide_to_Planning_and_Developing_Recreational_Trails_in_Ireland.pdf">www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Publications/Trail_Development/Guide_to_Planning_and_Developing_Recreational_Trails_in_Ireland.pdf</a></li> </ul>
11	Bird and bat boxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/Default.aspx?tabid=270">www.birdwatchireland.ie/Default.aspx?tabid=270</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.batconservationireland.org/pubs/reports/Leaflet_3_batboxes.pdf">www.batconservationireland.org/pubs/reports/Leaflet_3_batboxes.pdf</a></li> </ul>

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

	<b>Name</b>
1	Agnes Connolly
2	Anne Martin
3	Diane Davies
4	Donato Frietas
5	Dympna Pettit
6	G. Beggan
7	Gerard Hannon
8	Hugh Lahan
9	Joe Hannon
10	Liam Mulrooney
11	M. McNichols
12	Martin Connolly
13	Mary O'Malley
14	Mary Silke
15	May Doyle
16	Michael Nolan
17	Micheál Naughton
18	Nuala McDonagh
19	Pat McDonagh
20	Patricia Doona
21	Patrick Hannon
22	Phil Gunning
23	Regina Bannerton
24	Seán Naughton
25	Tomás Kenny
26	Ursula McDonnell