

# Castleblakeney

## Nature & Wildlife Plan

### 2013-2016



*This project received grant aid from Galway Rural Development Company Ltd.,  
Rural Development Programme which is financed  
by the Irish Government under the Rural Development  
Programme Ireland 2007-2013 and by the European  
Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe  
investing in Rural Areas.*



**Text:** Dr Janice Fuller

**Photos:** Janice Fuller

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Valerie Kinsella for organising refreshments and the venue. Galway County Heritage Forum and Galway County Biodiversity Steering Committee initiated the project, in partnership with Galway Rural Development. Miriam Stewart, Galway Rural Development, Marie Mannion and Elaine O’Riordan helped develop the project, and provided assistance and guidance to the project manager, Janice Fuller, which is gratefully acknowledged.

*Disclaimer: This report contains commercially sensitive and confidential information which should be treated in the strictest confidence. Galway Rural Development cannot accept responsibility for omissions or inaccuracies contained herein.*

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Castleblakeney.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Biodiversity Action Plans .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Process to produce the plan .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Community Action.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Castleblakeney Nature and Wildlife Plan.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Funding sources .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Biodiversity resources.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Appendix 1: List of participants in biodiversity training .....</b>	<b>15</b>

## **Introduction**

### **Castleblakeney**

Castleblakeney is a lovely village in east Galway, 23km north-west of Ballinasloe. The Castleblakeney Heritage Centre is a focal point in the village and a wonderful amenity for the community. The Heritage Centre celebrates the rich heritage and history of the area from the Gallagher Bogman (dated to 500BC), to the O'Kellys, the Blakeney's, Mary Anne Taylor (orphan of the famine sent to Australia) and up to the present day. The Gallagher Bogman was found in Gallagher Bog in 1821 and now lies in the National Museum. The O'Kelly Castle once stood on Gallagher Hill and a local heritage walking route takes in the hill and other features. One of the oldest Horse Fairs in the country is held in Castleblakeney in May every year.



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

Castleblakeney 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 Castleblakeney 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 Castleblakeney 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 Castleblakeney area.

The project to produce a local Biodiversity Action Plan for Castleblakeney 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 Castleblakeney

The Castleblakeney landscape is a mosaic of farmland with ditches and hedgerows, small raised bogs, wetlands, forestry, streams and rivers. It is an ancient landscape with castle ruins, ringforts and souterrains. The area is low-lying and gently undulating with small hills such as Gallagher Hill.



*Castleblakeney landscape*

A small river, the Cluain River flows through the village and the surrounding landscape. A 'River Walk' has been developed along an old boreen that was the route for villages down to Cluain Well, a source of clean drinking water used for generations. This area is known as church view as the old Church of Ireland, now the Heritage Centre, can be seen. Signage at the start of the walk highlights the natural heritage features of the route including the hawthorn hedge with ash trees, wildflowers such as meadow pea and silverweed, and wildlife that the lucky walker may spot in the summers months, herons, frogs, dragonflies and damselflies. The walk has been enhanced with planting of trees and flowers, and there is a seating area next to the river.



*Signage along the Cluain River Walk route*



*The Cluain River*

There are several small raised bogs dotted around the Castleblakeney landscape. Raised bogs are rare habitat internationally and Ireland has some of the best raised bogs in the world. Bogs have a fascinating flora because bog plants have to be able to cope with the nutrient-poor, acidic and waterlogged substrate (peat). Heathers, bog mosses, sedges and usual herbs like insect-eating plants thrive in the wet, peaty and acidic environment of bogs. 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.



*Ling heather: one of the most distinctive bog and heath plants*



## Community Action

Castleblakeney has an active community that has participated in the Town Towns competition for some time. The Castleblakeney Tidy Towns is a subgroup of the Castleblakeney Community Development Association. The work of the Tidy Towns is greatly assisted by a dedicated team of FÁS Community Employment Scheme workers who maintain the river walk, Heritage Centre, landscaping and village planting schemes.



## Castleblakeney Nature and Wildlife Plan

	<i>Project/ activity/ action</i>	<i>Project leader</i>	<i>Project Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
1	Protect and enhance the natural heritage along the River Walk e.g. planting native trees and shrubs, maintenance of existing planting.	Tidy Towns	FÁS, Biodiversity Project Manager	Ongoing
2	Run nature walks/ talks during Heritage Week and/or Biodiversity Week e.g. investigating aquatic life in the Cluain River	Tidy Towns	Biodiversity Project Manager	2013-2016
3	Plant native trees and shrubs in and around the village e.g. GAA pitch, schools etc.	FÁS	Tidy Towns, GCC	Annual
4	Put up, monitor and maintain bird and bat boxes	FÁS	Schools, Galway Bat Group	2013
5	Run Annual Spring Clean <i>Litter is unsightly and can be detrimental to wildlife</i>	Tidy Towns	Schools	Annual
6	Plant flowers to attract butterflies and bees in the village	Tidy Towns	FÁS	2013-2016
7	Cultivate herb garden at the Heritage Centre	Heritage Centre	FÁS	Ongoing
8	Investigate potential to restore the fishing resource with the river	Tidy Towns	Inland Fisheries Ireland, Galway County Council	2015

*GCC = Galway County Council, FÁS = FÁS Community Employment Scheme*

### Monitoring and Evaluation

A local group will be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the ‘Castleblakeney 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 ( <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**

Name (Group/ Individual)	Activities/ Expertise	Contact details
Marie Mannion, <b>Heritage Officer,</b> Galway County Council	All matters relating to heritage	mmannion@galwaycoco.ie www.galwaycountyheritage.com (091) 509198
Elaine O’Riordan, Galway County <b>Biodiversity Project Manager</b>	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.	www.npws.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 Castleblakeney Nature and Wildlife Plan**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Topic/ Activity</b>	<b>Information source</b>
1	River walk natural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.noticenature.ie/Walking_Trails_in_Ireland.html">www.noticenature.ie/Walking_Trails_in_Ireland.html</a></li> </ul>
2	Nature walks and talks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biodiversity Project Manager (contact details above)</li> </ul>
3	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>
4	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_bat_boxes.pdf">www.batconservationireland.org/pubs/reports/Leaflet_3_bat_boxes.pdf</a></li> </ul>
5	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.antaisce.ie">www.antaisce.ie</a></li> </ul>
6	Planting 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>
7	Herb garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biodiversity Project Manager (contact details above)</li> </ul>
8	Cluain River: fishing potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.fisheriesireland.ie">www.fisheriesireland.ie</a></li> <li>• <a href="mailto:galway@fisheriesireland.ie">galway@fisheriesireland.ie</a></li> <li>• Inland Fisheries Ireland 091 563118</li> </ul>

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

	<b>Name</b>
1	Valerie Kinsella
2	Cathal Kilroy
3	Mathe Kilroy
4	Paddy Curley
5	Tomás Gordon
6	Gerard Finnegan
7	Raymond Flannery
8	C Curley
9	Joe Curley
10	Kieran Crehan
11	Paul Connolly
12	Breda Mulrennan
13	Jimmy Laffey
14	Marian Hardiman
15	Eileen Coffey
16	John Healy
17	Michael Delaney
18	Matt Lohan
19	O Flaherty
20	Vincent McDevitt
21	Sheila Taylor