

Ballydangan Bog Red Grouse Project

Project Report: 2021



Project open day - August 2021

12 Nov. 2021

Report in response to funding by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage under the Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme 2021.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Summary

Established in 2009, the Ballydangan Bog Red Grouse Project aims to prevent the decline and, in the long-term, increase the numbers of Red Grouse and other birds of conservation concern including breeding Curlew on Ballydangan Bog, Co. Roscommon.

Building on the original project management plans 2010-2015 and 2016-2020, this conservation plan (2021-2025) provides the local community (e.g. Moore Gun Club, Moore Community Council and local farmers) as well as the partners involved with detailed guidance on how to improve the ecological conditions of the site in a manner that supports a diversity of wildlife species and existing conservation priorities.

The project utilises the best biological methods available for Red Grouse and breeding Curlew conservation. The management is achieved through a range of strategies, including habitat improvement, predator control, monitoring, disturbance control, public awareness and education.

An unintended consequence of the project has been the arrival of breeding Curlew to the project site. This plan sets out to better incorporate the needs of this critically endangered species into the conservation programme building on experiences learned.

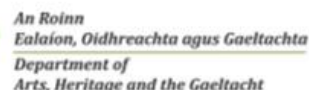
As a community-based venture, the project also aims to engage with the local community to create awareness about the importance of Red Grouse conservation on raised bogs. Some of the public awareness activities include the development of educational material, hosting school visits and disseminating the project's outcomes through site visits and local press.

This conservation plan is intended to be dynamic and will be reviewed annually. It recommends actively consulting with stakeholders and encouraging participation and involvement from the local community in the management programme.

Monitoring, evaluation and active dissemination of the results and lessons learned will remain integral parts of the project and its aftermath.

This project is managed by Moore Gun Club and Roscommon Regional Game Council in conjunction with Bord na Móna, Moore Community Council, the National Association of Regional Game Councils, FÁS/Department of Social Protection, the Heritage Council, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Roscommon County Council. The project has been also supported by the Local Agenda 21 (Environmental Partnership) Grant Scheme.

www.ballydanganbog.com



Acknowledgements

The project team would like to acknowledge the grant aid from the Heritage Council of €6,000 to the project in 2010, 2011, 2012; €5,000 in 2014, €4,000 in 2015, €8000 in 2016, €5,500 in 2017, €7,000 in 2018 and €4,500 in 2021. This significant financial support is greatly appreciated.

Through Moore Community Council, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) has annually allocated personnel to work on the project site for the duration of the project. This contribution from FÁS/DSP is set to continue for the foreseeable future.

The project would like to acknowledge the financial support of €4,000 per year (from 2010-2015) from the National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC) through their Irish Habitat Trust Fund.

Bord na Móna has generously agreed to provide the use of Ballydangan Bog for the Red Grouse project. The project would not be possible without this support. Bord na Móna has also provided funding for several actions and ongoing technical support towards the project's management practices.

The project would like to acknowledge the contribution from Dr. Mark McCorry from Bord na Móna as well as David Fallon and Dr. Catherine Farrell, who previously worked for Bord na Móna. David Fallon has remained actively engaged in providing ecological advice on the project's implementation.

The project team would like to acknowledge the ongoing support and grant aid from National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of €3,000 in 2011 and €1,500 in 2017 and €4450.00 in 2018/2019 under the NPWS Curlew Conservation Partnership. The project team would also like to acknowledge the assistance from NPWS during the translocation exercise (2014) and the donation of one tonne of grit supplied in December 2013.

The project would like to acknowledge the support of €3,000 from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage under the Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme 2021.

The project would like to acknowledge the grant of €5,000 to purchase a heather cutting machine under the Co. Roscommon LEADER Programme in 2021.

Moore Gun Club and Roscommon Regional Game Council would like to acknowledge the grant of €500 provided by Roscommon County Council under the Community Heritage Bursary 2013.

The project team would also like to acknowledge the grant of €1,500 from Roscommon County Council under biodiversity Action 1.16 of the County Roscommon Heritage Plan to: "Promote and encourage participation wildlife projects and surveys, which gather information on habitats and species throughout the county" (2013-2014).

Finally, the project team would like to acknowledge the Local Agenda 21 (Environmental Partnership) Grant Scheme (2013-2014) for a grant of €1,000; and in 2015 for a grant of €500 towards the development of environmental and awareness resources for primary and secondary schools.

Introduction

For a number of decades, members of the local Moore community (in Moore Gun Club and Roscommon Regional Game Council) expressed concern about declining Red Grouse populations on raised bogs throughout County Roscommon. Many Gun Club members recall numerous populations of Red Grouse in the past, however, there has been a continuous decline with several local extinctions. This is primarily due to habitat loss via commercial peat extraction, which has since ceased.

In late 2009, Moore Gun Club and Roscommon Regional Game Council undertook an effort to initiate a conservation project to address the declining Red Grouse population on Ballydangan bog, Co. Roscommon.

The original project conservation plan (2010-2015) produced by Scallan (2009) established a framework to achieve community-based conservation actions on Ballydangan Bog in a manner that supports Red Grouse, a healthy diversity and abundance of wildlife species and human uses. Moore Community Council played a key role in providing resources to implement the project's actions through a community employment scheme.



Initial meeting between project team and Bord na Móna (2009)

The plan recommended actively consulting with Red Grouse stakeholders and encouraged participation and involvement from the local community in the management programme. At the time, it was decided that the plan's working time-frame shall be five-year intervals. In 2015, a decision was taken to develop a new conservation plan from 2016-2020. A revised Conservation Plan (2021-2025) was produced with support by the Heritage Council and the NPWS Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme revised plan provides a framework to operate for the next four years, until 2025.

Aims of Project

The main purpose of this project is to limit the specific factors affecting Red Grouse and breeding Curlew on Ballydangan Bog while supporting existing conservation priorities for the site. More specifically, the Ballydangan Bog Red Grouse Conservation Project aims to:

- Provide best-practice management strategies aimed at increasing the Red Grouse, breeding Curlew and other ground nesting birds on Ballydangan Bog;
- Implement management strategies in a manner that supports wider biodiversity goals, particularly for the conservation of raised bog habitat other red-listed bird species;

- Promote community involvement in planning and decision-making;
- Maintain an atmosphere of cooperation, participation and commitment among conservation rangers, landowners, land managers and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of Red Grouse management strategies;
- Encourage the long-term funding necessary to ensure the survival of Ballydangan's Red Grouse population and to facilitate the collection and analysis of data during the course of the project.

Activity Summary: Actions for the Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme 2021

Improvement of parking access area:

NPWS and Bord na Mona were informed of the works to be conducted. The site work took place in October 2021, which was outside the sensitive season for bird nesting. The works were conducted in line with the description provided in the project application.

The section of the entrance road, adjacent to the project hut was improved by means of removing some grass and making a small increase of the road by circa 10 meters in length and 3 meters in width. The materials were delivered on site via contractor for spreading via voluntary community members, and CE workers, with the supervision of a Project Committee member.

This extension involved the remaking of the existing hard surface area, so we can now facilitate a safe space for the parking of cars, and small buses which currently bring groups of people on site for guided events or walks.



Works in progress



Works in progress



Work in progress



Works completed – parking access repaired and safe for vehicles (October 2021)

Improvement of walking path (via filling of holes and clearance of scrub)



Before work took place



Example of completed works – walking path improvement

The images on the previous page are examples of the road improvement works. This mainly involved applying some sand and chippings enabling a safer, more level walking environment for site users/visitors. There were a number of large holes and uneven surfaces with potential trip hazard for site users. The footpath improvements and enhancing works, filling in varying potholes, have made the site safer for the project team and visitors.

Revision of Conservation Plan

Dr. David Scallan launched a process of consultation with the project team to revise the existing conservation plan. The revised completed plan is included as part of this submission. It sets the framework for action until 2025 covering the mains work areas.

The plan also recommends actively consulting with Red Grouse stakeholders and encourages participation and involvement from the local community in the management programme. At the time, it was decided that the plan's working time-frame shall be five-year intervals. This revised plan provides a framework to operate for the next four years, until 2025.

Other actions during 2021:

Monitoring:

Red Grouse:

- Spring survey - 1 male bird (March 2021).
- Autumn survey - 1 adult and 2 juveniles (August 2021).

Curlew:

- Breeding curlew survey produced 4-5 pairs based on several site visits as outlined in the breeding Curlew survey report 2021 (enclosed).
- Breeding curlew report (2021) enclosed.
- Data on monitoring submitted to *national biodiversity data centre*.



Overview of Curlew and Red Grouse situation on Ballydangan Bog (2009-2021):

Year	Grouse - Spring	Grouse - Autumn	Curlew pairs	Curlew productivity
2009	No survey	3	0	Not assessed
2010	No survey	1	0	Not assessed
2011	2	3	0	Not assessed
2012	1 (tape-lure survey)	2	2 pairs	Not assessed
2013	0	0	2 pairs	Not assessed
2014	0	1	1 pair	Not assessed
2015	2	1	3 pairs	Not assessed
2016	1-2	2	7 pairs	Not assessed
2017	2 (i.e. 1 pair)	3	3-4 pairs	0
2018	3 hens, 1 cock	1 pair + juv. & 2 cocks*	1/2 – 7 pairs	Juveniles heard/observed
2019	2 calling cocks	2/3	Min. 4 pairs	Likely 1 pair hatched chicks
2020**	1 pair	2/3	No survey	No survey
2021	1 cock (March)	1 cock + 2 juveniles	4-5 pairs	Juveniles heard/observed

* Two surveys were conducted in autumn 2018 and 2019 covering different parts of the project site.

** Covid-19 prevented Curlew survey work on the site.

In 2021, three pairs of Lapwing produced several juvenile birds that successfully fledged.

Nest Protection:

- Focused efforts were put in place by the project team following best practice guidelines.
- Predator control licenses were applied for and received from NPWS (2021).
- Some traps (for Mink and Hooded Crow/Magpie) were purchased this year to support nest protection efforts.

Education/awareness:

There were several meetings and site visits linked to the project:

- April: Online meeting with Trish Clarke from the Lottery Good Causes Awards.
- May: Visit from [DPD](#) with a view to providing funding for the project.
- May: Site visit from Claire Mc Cormack from the Farming Independent who published an article on the project:
<https://www.independent.ie/business/farming/forestry-enviro/environment/how-local-farmers-in-roscommon-and-their-community-got-together-to-protect-rare-birds-40488002.html>
- July: Site visit from Susan Crawford and colleagues from Co. Clare to learn more about the project with a view to establishing their own project.
- July: Online meeting with Mr. Malcolm Noonan TD, Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
- August: Heritage Week open day.
- September: Visits from Peatlands conference
- October/November: Visits from Peatlands conference

  <p>How local farmers in Roscommon and their community got together to... THE Ballydangan Red Grouse Project in Co Roscommon is upheld as a leading example of community-based conservation in Ireland — and ... independent.ie</p> <p>1 June 2021, <i>Farming Independent</i> article (link)</p>	  <p>WORLD CURLEW DAY 2021</p>   <p>#BIODIVERSITYMANIFESTO</p>   <p>European project promotion by www.face.eu</p>
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Project open day (August 2021)

Habitat management:

- Some heather was strimmed in February 2021.
- Some areas of scrub will be managed in September 2021.

Note: Heather cannot be cut from March-September.



Heather strimming - February 2021



See video here: [link](#)

Grit provision:

- Grit stations on the site were maintained.

Revision of conservation plan:

- The projects 5-year conservation plan was revised by Dr. David Scallan.

Account of the benefits of the works e.g. to heritage, to local community, local economy, or to relevant interest group:

HERITAGE: This project has managed to prevent the decline and improve the numbers of Red Grouse on Ballydangan Bog. The management works have also improved the ecological conditions for a number of other red-listed bird species on the project site including breeding Curlew. Habitat management on Ballydangan Bog has helped rejuvenate young heather and consequently, has provided a structured habitat for grouse. The project has provided a logical template with significant potential to benefit and educate other groups who plan to improve or maintain Red Grouse habitat in their respective areas.

LOCAL COMMUNITY: Education/Awareness: The project team distributed educational materials (i.e. the resource packs) to local schools. Through the involvement of DSP, Moore Gun Club has been successful in introducing a new skill-set to the local community. We have continued to obtain the support of local landowners and, more importantly stakeholders such as Bord na Mona to use the project site. The 2021 project open day was a success in providing awareness about the project. The project team actively encouraged local people in the Moore Community to become involved in the project.

LOCAL ECONOMY: This project has generated a strong interest in awareness about heritage management within the local community. It has also illustrated the role that a local community can play in biodiversity conservation management. The project has played an important role in initiating other projects. The small grant from the Heritage Council funding directly supports two part-time jobs on the project site. Management of a raised bog produces a range of public goods for the local community, including flood mitigation, clear air and water as well as other ecosystem services.

Open day 2021:

During Heritage Week, the project organised an open day on Saturday, 21st of August 2021. Presentations were given on the site by Pat Feehily, Pat Dunning, Vincent Flannelly and David Fallon. There was excellent attendance. Presenters discussed bog restoration, habitat management, predator control, heather management, awareness-raising, Red Grouse, Curlew and other wildlife on the site. The event was promoted locally and on social media (Twitter) before during and after.



Example links to twitter promotion:

<https://twitter.com/BallydanganBog/status/1429405930760949763?s=20>
<https://twitter.com/BallydanganBog/status/1429179601436254214?s=20>
<https://twitter.com/BallydanganBog/status/1428624803179765764?s=20>