



An Taisce e-zine

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Photos show just some of the birds that can be seen at Booterstown featured on page 4



An Taisce Celebrates International Year of Biodiversity



An Taisce is delighted to celebrate 2010 as 'International Year for Biological Diversity', as declared by the UN. We are eager to see biodiversity move up the civil and political agenda. Stavros Dimas, European Commissioner for the Environment, has repeatedly called for Biodiversity to be given the same level of attention as Climate Change. He recently stated that keeping ecosystems healthy makes economic sense and is vital to control climate change.

An Taisce is working towards placing Biodiversity issues at the fore of national and local activities. The approach is two pronged; We need to see much raised awareness of the immense value of biodiversity and ecosystems services to society and to foster greater recognition of biodiversity as the basis of our life support systems. After all it is clean, healthy functioning ecosystems that provide us with clean air and water, food, building materials, fuel and

medicine.

We also need to see action: implementation of existing Irish and European policies, and integration of biodiversity considerations into other policy arenas such as planning, forestry, public procurement, drainage / flood management, health, and so on. Towards this end we are actively pursuing the integration of Biodiversity into Flood Management and Climate Change adaptation strategies, National Forest Policy, and Aquaculture and Fisheries management. A recently published report commissioned by the European Union found that underlying the causes of Biodiversity Loss are:

- Failures in governance, appropriate decision making, and institutional functioning.
- lack of adequate knowledge and understanding of ecosystem processes and ecosys-

tem services

This matches what we see in Ireland, where our Biodiversity gems – Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas for Birds (SPAs) – are not properly protected by state agencies responsible for doing so, including planning, forestry, and aquaculture licensing. With ongoing pressure from An Taisce and other NGOs, and the European Commission keeping watch on the delivery of environmental policy, we are moving in the right direction.

To see a copy of the above referred report, go to <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/biodiversity/index.htm>

For lots more information on Biodiversity in relation to Climate Change, forestry, and turf cutting, peat, planning, tips on what you can do to help halt the loss of Biodiversity, and much more, go to <http://www.antaisce.org/naturalenvironment>

Biodiversity Basics

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity is short for 'biological diversity'. It is the variety of all life forms on Earth, from the tiniest bugs in the soil to garden butterflies, and from the plants they feed on to the biggest whales in the sea. Biodiversity includes the diversity of individuals within a species (genetic diversity), diversity of species within an ecosystem or habitat (species diversity) and the diversity of ecosystems or habitats (habitat diversity).

Why is it important to us?

Biodiversity is the basis of human existence, our life support system. Ecosystems regulate climatic processes, breakdown wastes and recycle nutrients, filter and purify water, buffer against flooding, maintain soil fertility, purify air, and provide natural resources such as wood, textiles, and of course food. All agriculture depends fundamentally on Biodiversity, as do marine and freshwater food resources.

Biodiversity of Ireland

Ireland has a plethora of unique and wonderful habitats, including our bogs and marshes, estuaries and saltmarshes, native woodlands and hedges, and particularly unusual places like the Burren in Co. Clare and undisturbed rocky islands off our coast. We, as citizens, all need to do our bit to make sure these places are left intact for the next generation. We will carry more Biodiversity related features and links and tips on what you can do in each of our monthly newsletters in 2010. **Watch this space!**



“There is now detectable evidence that climate change is having a real impact on European species”

Marcus Zisensis

“some proposed Natural Heritage areas are safeguarded but 617 are completely vulnerable”

Anja Murray Natural Heritage officer



Photo credits: Camilla Keane and Dara Stanley

10 Messages for 2010

Every month the European Environment Agency EAA will issue a “message for 2010”, which will highlight one theme per month until the tenth meeting of the conference of the parties (COP) to the United Nations convention on Biological diversity (CDB) Each message provides a short assessment focusing on a specific ecosystem or issue related to biodiversity in Europe. We aim to bring you a summary of this monthly message in our newsletter.

Climate change and biodiversity

The variety of life underpins our social and economic wellbeing and will be increasingly an indispensable resource in the battle against climate change. However, our consumption and production patterns are depriving ecosystems of their capacity

to withstand climate change and deliver the services we need from them.

As we understand more about the ways that climate change is impacting biodiversity, it becomes clear that we cannot tackle the two crises separately. Their interdependence requires us to address them together.

The full message is available at <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/10-messages-for-2010/message-1-biodiversity-and-climate-change>

The message was written by Marcus Zisensis (ECNC, ETC/BD), with contributions from the ETC/BD by Dominique Richard/MNHN, Sophie Condé/MNHN, Doug Evans/SNH.

Natural Heritage Areas: the case for conservation

The team in the Natural Environment Office of An Taisce has just completed a review of Ireland’s NHAs. NHAs (Natural Heritage Areas) often contain a mosaic of different habitats, encompassing different flora, fauna, and geology, all of which contribute to their ecological value and help provide us with important services such as clean water, flood control, carbon absorption.

Currently only bog NHA’s have been granted full protection in law. There are a further 617 proposed NHA’s (pNHA’s) round the country which do not have full legal protection, and massive unchallenged and unrecorded destruction of these is taking place.

Some pNHA’s overlap other designations (e.g. SPA’s and SAC’s) but 617 are completely vulnerable and our review has looked at the degree of protection provided by the state including the efforts and abilities of Local Authorities to defend these sites. One glaring example is that if a wetland pNHA is drained the Local Authority has no legal right to stop it. Until the DoEHLG awards full NHA status to these pNHA’s along with full guidance these inconsistencies within Local Authority policy will remain.

An Taisce’s review compares Ireland’s record with similar areas in France and Britain and makes the case that better com-

munity and landowner participation are crucial for successful protection and management of these areas.

The report identifies more than 120 sites which could be awarded NHA orders tomorrow were the will there. This includes 54 woodland sites, 43 important bat sites and 25 sites with unique geology. Many more need simple boundary consultation and definition to be ready. Fen and limestone pavement pNHA’s need to be prioritised in this work as we have obligations under the habitats directive and climate change adaptations to complete this. Without progress in this work these sites and many others will be lost due to lack of protection.

Evidence suggests that pNHA’s are being damaged and lost at an alarming rate, but granting of NHA orders for the pNHA’s described in this report is an achievable task for the government in 2010, the International Year for Biodiversity. This protection must be supported by training and guidance for Local Authorities and other agencies who are responsible for day to day protection of these sites.

The review was completed with the support of the Heritage Council under the Wildlife Grants Scheme 2009. for a full copy of the report go to <http://www.antaisce.org/naturalenvironment/Biodiversity/NaturalHeritageAreasTheCaseforConservation/tabid/633/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

Green Communities

Green Communities is an environmental programme operated jointly by the An Taisce Education Unit and Keep Wales Tidy. The Green Communities programme is funded by a grant from the European Regional Development Fund Interreg 4A Ireland Wales Programme. Through Green Communities, An Taisce & Keep Wales Tidy work with grass roots community groups in certain counties in both Ireland and Wales to actively enhance local biodiversity while also minimising the carbon footprint of group activities. The Green Communities team is on hand to support com-



munity groups as they carry out their Green Communities activities and to provide information and guidance to groups. Groups can apply for a small annual grant to go towards their Green Communities activities. Examples of typical Green Communities activities by community groups include

- the following:
- Development of a community garden to promote local food production and to bring communities together
- Development of a wildlife area in a green space
- Regular clean ups and conservation work (eg marram grass planting or hedgerow maintenance)
- Sensitive clearance work (eg

clearing a neglected area of land so that it provides a green space for people to enjoy and an enhanced habitat for wildlife)



Erection and maintenance of habitat boxes eg bird, bat, hedgehog, owl boxes

Eradication of invasive species such as

Japanese Knotweed, Rhododendron, etc

For further information on the Green Communities programme in Ireland, please contact Deirdre McGovern or Emlyn Cullen on 01 4002202. The Green Communities website www.greencommunity.org will be online in the New Year.

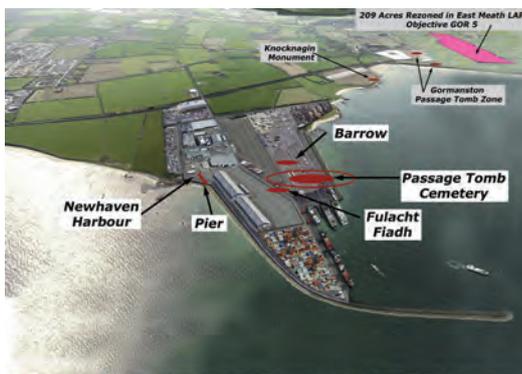
Photos show Baleskin Reception Centre and Dolphins Barn community group

Bremore Port

The proposal to build a new port straddling the Fingal and Meath border is likely to be the most controversial to affect an Irish heritage site since the M3 motorway near the hill of Tara in the early 2000s.

Not only is the proposed site, on the Delvin River, a magnificent landscape woven with legend and ancient places of importance but it also boasts an unspoilt stretch of beach, clear waters and is home to varied species of wildlife. The passage tombs which are threatened by the development are thought to be the origins of the whole Irish passage grave culture.

For many years the Drogheda Port Company has been seeking to build a deep water port competing with Dublin



All sites of archaeological and historical importance at Bremore Point will be obliterated by the proposed new port contrary to EU Law
The Gormanston sites would be placed at grave risk by inevitable ancillary related developments

Port. Already the Bremore Port Company (a joint venture between Drogheda Port and Treasury holdings) is behaving as if legal consent for the port is a given thing. Decisions have already been made as to the new ports operator- Hong Kong-based multinational Wampura, and Drogheda Port is attempting to extend its jurisdiction in order to use compulsory purchase orders and is seeking fast track planning

permission through the Strategic Infrastructure Act. The new port would be a 24 hour floodlit operation including road and rail access, container storage and huge numbers of lorry movements, that would irrevocably change the character of the this undeveloped section of the east coast. There are also wider global impacts on green house gas emissions and resource consumption. Tonnage of imports has doubled over the last 20 years and the future success of this port is predicated on a further doubling within the next 20. The emissions from global shipping is comparable to aviation, but both escaped inclusion in the Kyoto Protocol. Reduction of these emissions is essential rather than the increase needed to make this port economic. This port would also increase Ireland's capacity to soak up global resources, particularly cheap, plastic consumer goods as well as steel and other heavy goods manufactured in energy intensive plants in China.

Focus on Booterstown Marsh

In only its second year of existence, An Taisce resolved to acquire Booterstown Marsh as a reserve. Our informal management culminated finally in a lease from the Pembroke estate in 1971. Booterstown has been recognised as important for wildlife for over a hundred years, with both the Irish Society for the Preservation of Birds and the Dublin Naturalist Field Club playing an active part in its conservation. In the 1890's the DNFC discovered the existence of the rare Borrers Salt Marsh grass *Punciella fasciculata*. This red data book species is still present today.

The marsh has always attracted visitors, who find the diverse landscape of strand, raised beach, dune system, tidal mudflats, salt marsh, brackish and fresh water habitats a great place to watch birds and enjoy other fauna and flora. This combined with ease of access (the railway station is next door) means that it is the ideal place to raise awareness about and protect part of the unique ecology of Dublin Bay. Booterstown Marsh has a constant source of fresh water from a spring line created by a junction between surface boulder clay and granite bedrock. This spring line marks the ancient shoreline under Rock Road, which was built in the 19th century on a dune system. The whole south shore of Dublin Bay once consisted of extensive creeks, mudflats and salt marshes rather similar to Portmarnock in Fingal

today. The coming of the Dublin to Kingstown railway changed the entire landscape and Booterstown and the adjoining South Bull Dune System are the last remnants of once extensive ecosystems which have been canalised, drained, eroded and infilled and are therefore uniquely important.

The Marsh and neighbouring Dublin Bay are internationally protected as Special Protection Areas for Birds (SPAs) and Special Areas for Conservation (SAC's) for their habitats. Each year hundred of waders such as knot, dunlin, redshank, greenshank, snipe and godwit join the Brent geese and duck during the winter. And in summer egrets, herons and watterrail breed there. The Marsh also has a mosaic of plant communities ranging from salt, brackish and freshwater assemblages to woodland, sandy shore and even sea cliffs plants. The Marsh is cared for by An Taisce through its Dun Laoghaire Association and the Properties and Conservation officer at Tailors' Hall. The input of local people is a vital to its long term management and many neighbours and users join scientific advisors, including Birdwatch Ireland, to sit on its Management Advisory Council.

However there are serious threats to Booterstown including the Sutton to

Sandycove cycle route, which if routed along the coast, would encourage people into the bird roosting area severely disturbing the SPA and SAC and will further distance the marsh from the bay. Development pressures also exist including the adjoining Ash Castle site, owned by Bernard McNamara; plans for an Eastern Bypass motorway and the development of Blackrock Park. An Taisce wishes to acquire the freehold when its lease expires in 2021 and may also be interested in safeguarding the Ash Castle site from adverse development.

The marsh is served by the Booterstown Dart station, buses on the Rock Road and cycle routes. Excellent bird watching can be had from a viewing platform opposite the Tara Towers Hotel and the Dart carpark, the best bird numbers and variety will be seen on a winter high tide but the reserve is worth visiting at any time of the year. Please remember- one dog, jogger or child can cause fatal disturbance to birds - birds need peace to eat and need to eat to survive.!

Having A Say On New Water Advisory Councils



The call for nominees for the new River Basin Advisory Councils is expected soon and SWAN will again be co-ordinating the selection of the environmental nominees to the Councils. To do this, they are organising a series of selection meetings around the country – one in each River Basin District

North Western RBD: TBC

Cohost: Save the Swilly (TBC)

When: Tues, 2nd Feb

Where: TBC

Neagh Bann RBD:

Cohost: Ballybay Wetlands Centre

When: Wed, 3rd Feb

Where: Monaghan, Ballybay; Ballybay Wetlands Centre, Derryvalley Farm, Ballybay, Co. Monaghan

The purpose of these meetings is to select the best nominees from the environmental community to represent the environment sector

on the water advisory councils. If you are interested in how the rivers, lakes, bays and groundwater of your region are managed and you would like a say in promoting sustainable water management, then this meeting is for you.

contact info@swanireland.ie for all the information that you need.



Tailors Hall,
Back Lane
Dublin 8

Phone: 01 4541786

E-mail concerning issues in this ezine:

jeff@rokeby.ie

general enquiries admin@antaisce.org

Preserving our built and natural heritage for future generations

Your views are important to An Taisce. Please don't hesitate to send us any feedback on content, format, etc. of this newsletter, and if there are any topics in particular that you'd like to see covered, we'll do our best to get them in.

Sincerely,

Jeff Young

Hon Secretary, An Taisce -- the National Trust for Ireland jeff@rokeby.ie

and Abby McSherry, Local Associations Officer

membership@antaisce.org

