

Clare's Big Biodiversity Launch: The First Local Biodiversity Action Plan in Ireland

County Clare is the first county in Ireland to produce a Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The *Clare Biodiversity Action Plan* will be launched on Thursday the 18th of May in Ennis as well as *Recording the Wildlife of County Clare* and other publications. The County Mayor Cllr Patrick Keane will launch these publications on Thursday at 1.45pm in the Council Chamber, County Museum, Ennis, Co. Clare. Everyone is welcome to attend the launch and pick up a copy of the plan.

The Clare Biodiversity Group is directing the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan process in the county. The group consists of representatives from a variety of organisations both governmental and non-governmental as well as individuals with an interest or expertise in biodiversity in the County. Members include Clare County Council, Irish Seed Savers Association, the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Irish Farmers Association, the Forest Service as well as individual experts such as Brendan Dunford. Chairperson of the Clare Biodiversity Group, Dr Simon Berrow will talk about the Clare Group's work. Dr. Simon Berrow said "the main aim of the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan is to Conserve the biodiversity of County Clare. This will be achieved by prioritising, coordinating and initiating action to ensure the effective conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Clare and by raising awareness and appreciation of local biodiversity through involving local communities and informing policy."

County Clare has been leading the way in appreciation and protection of heritage in Ireland for some time now. Clare was one of the first counties to have a Heritage Officer in post and one of the first counties to produce a Heritage Plan. The production of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan is one of the many natural heritage objectives in the County Clare Heritage Plan 2003-2007. According to Congella McGuire, the Heritage Officer "the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan process would not have been possible without funding from the Heritage Council, LEADER and Clare County Council, and the dedicated members of the Clare Biodiversity Group who volunteer their time and expertise."

The National Biodiversity Plan, which was published by the government in 2002, requires each Local Authority to produce a Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Local Biodiversity Action Plans also contribute to Countdown 2010. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) have set a worldwide aim to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

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What is biodiversity? Biodiversity is an abbreviation for biological diversity. Biological diversity is the variety of all life, the variety of plants and animals and the range of areas where they live. Biodiversity includes species, habitats and genetic diversity. Biodiversity includes everything from microscopic insects to the largest whale, from tiny algae to huge ancient trees. Biodiversity is much more than just a few rare animals and plants it is the variety of all living species and the habitats which they live in. Biodiversity does not just include wildlife; it is the variety of all life including domestic animals, crops and even humans.

We could not survive without biodiversity. It provides us with many services and products necessary for human life. Therefore the conservation of biodiversity is very important. Products include food such as fish, meat and vegetables. Biodiversity provides us with fuel and building materials from wood, peat, oil and coal. All medicines are derived from extracts of plants or animals. Biodiversity also provides us with beautiful land and seascapes. Some of the many functions biodiversity provides include air and water purification, control of pests and diseases, pollination of crops and soil stabilisation. To attempt to manufacture the products and services biodiversity provides is enormously expensive and often impossible. Biodiversity is disappearing at an alarming rate worldwide, primarily due to the loss of habitats. Therefore it is very important that we protect biodiversity locally as well as nationally and globally.