

New Initiative Launched to Raise Awareness of the Pivotal Role Farmers Play in Protecting Ireland's Environment and Heritage

The Heritage Council and Teagasc have teamed up together to recognise the enormous role farmers play as custodians of much of Ireland's natural heritage and have produced an informative and colourful guide for farmers.

The new guide, called **'Farmland Habitats'** which is in response to the greater need to understand biodiversity on farmland, was launched at *Agriculture and Food '06 in Kildalton on Wednesday 21st June*. With over 48,000 or 40% of farmers in REPS, best practice in the management of wildlife habitats on farms is important.

'Farmland habitats' is an introduction to the habitats commonly found on farmland in Ireland. Habitats are described with words and pictures, along with the flora and fauna found in these habitats. These include grasslands, arable fields, woodland, peatland, watercourses and built habitats. It highlights those elements of farmland that are of greatest value to Ireland's biodiversity and identifies ways that farming practice influence habitat quality. It will be of interest to all farmers and advisers who want to improve the wildlife value of farmland.

"All of the Irish landscape has been farmed to some extent for the past 6,000 years and this has shaped our natural heritage by creating a patchwork of grasslands, fields, hedgerows and forests" said Dr. Tom O'Dwyer, Chairman of Teagasc and The Heritage Council. "The relationship between farming and heritage is not often acknowledged and this new guide will provide detailed knowledge for farmers on the national and international importance of the impact that their farming activities have on wildlife, habitats and the environment."

Recent decades have seen great improvements in the productivity of Irish farmland and the development of a vibrant agri-food sector. While these changes have delivered real financial benefits to farming and rural communities they have also created a loss of natural habitats for Ireland's wildlife and biodiversity. The loss of natural habitats and species has been the driving force behind EU policy reform and has often thrown the relationship between farming and heritage into sharp focus.

The new guide provides valuable information on the natural habitats that exist on farms and the role traditional farming methods have played over thousands of years on maintaining these habitats. Recent CAP reforms and European policy changes takes greater account of the importance of farming practices for the survival of endangered wildlife, flower and insect species and the need to maintain traditional farming practices if these important habitats are to survive into the future.

Earlier this year (2006) the Heritage Council called for a considerable change of emphasis so that agri-environmental payment to the farmers who contribute most to heritage management. The new booklet and joint initiative with Teagasc provides key information to farmers about the vital role they play and the steps they can take to restore natural habitats.

The booklet outlines the species that are at risk and explains how a rich natural biodiversity is needed for a healthy environment. The corn bunting has become extinct in Ireland since 1990 and 95 bird species, including the barn owl are threatened or in serious decline. It is believed that over 120 species of flowering plants including grassland orchids are in serious decline and the country could face EU penalties if improvements are not made.

The booklet is available from:

**Publications,
Teagasc Head Office,
Oak Park,
Carlow**

Tel: 059-9170200

<http://www.teagasc.ie>

or

**The Heritage Council,
Rothe House,
Kilkenny**

Tel: 056-7770777

<http://www.heritagecouncil.ie>

Download

http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/publications/built-natural_heritage/heritage_habitat.pdf

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