

NEW ACTION PLANS SEEK TO PROTECT THREATENED WILDLIFE SPECIES & HABITATS

Friday 26th May 2007 - Ten Biodiversity action plans aimed at conserving and protecting some of Ireland's most endangered wildlife species and habitats have been launched in County Clare.

Among the plans produced and published by the Clare Heritage Office, in association with the Clare Biodiversity Group, is a strategy for protecting the Burren region's world famous limestone pavement landscape, and a study into the threats and the conservation status of unique species such as the Irish Pollan and Leisler's Bat.

Biodiversity and heritage enthusiasts are welcoming the publication of the action plans, which have received the support of the Heritage Council. "This is a major step in Biodiversity protection and promotion", stated Hillary Gleeson of the Irish Seedsavers Association.

She continued, "The action plans will be of tremendous benefit to those of us who are dedicated to enhancing the position of wildlife in the County by informing specific actions for specific issues."

Tomás Mac Conmara, Acting Heritage Officer, Clare County Council said the action plans had been initiated in response to Clare's rich heritage and diverse wildlife habitats coming under increasing threat.

Explaining the need to develop a Burren limestone pavement Action Plan, Mr. Mac Conmara stated, "The growing demands of the tourism and leisure industry and increasing visitor numbers are taking their toll on the environment of the Burren. This has resulted in environmental damage through car parking and camping on fragile species-rich limestone grasslands, and the destruction of limestone pavement through construction by visitors of 'mini-dolmens' and removal of weathered limestone for garden products."

"The increasing numbers of visitors to Clare's environmentally-sensitive wildlife is also threatening the County's many sand dune systems. An action plan, due to be launched in June, will concentrate on a range of conservation measures including the reduction of vehicular and pedestrian access to the fragile dunes. We will shortly be implanting measures aimed at managing current visitor pressure on the sensitive environments of these sites", Mr. Mac Conmara added.

Wildlife species such as the Cuckoo, Leisler's Bats and Irish Pollan are also the subject of conservation and protection measures under the new plans. The Cuckoo Action Plan is set to continue research in to population numbers of the migrating bird having recently completed Ireland's first-ever Cuckoo survey. The survey found that the bird was making a resurgent comeback in the west of the country.

The Irish Pollan Action Plan will focus on gathering information on one of the country's rarest and most endangered species of fish. Lough Derg in East Clare currently is the home of a dwindling population of the species.

Meanwhile, the Leisler's Bat Action Plan will focus on the threats and the conservation status of one of Ireland's least common mammals. Clare has internationally important populations of the Leisler's Bat, which is strictly protected in Ireland under the Wildlife Act (1976) and the EU Habitats Directive.

Commenting on the publication of the action plans, Dr. Simon Berrow, Chairperson of the Clare Biodiversity Group stated, "The action plans only outline what is required for the protection of the habitats and species identified and it is now imperative that the actions outlined are implemented on a progressive and consistent basis and in conjunction with local communities in order to ensure a lasting positive impact on our natural heritage."

Several of the action plans were officially launched during Clare's first ever Biodiversity Week, which continues until Saturday 26th May.

The Cuckoo Action plan was launched at the Dawn Chorus at the Burren National Park on Sunday 20th, The Lungwort Action Plan was launched at the Irish Seedsavers Biodiversity Day in Scariff on Sunday 20th. On Monday 21st, Stephen Ward of the Clare Biodiversity Group launched the Fen Action plan at a nature walk at the Dromore nature reserve where NPWS ranger provided a guided walk through the woodland. The Leisler's Bat Action plan was launched at a Bat Walk through Raheen Woods in Tuamgraney on Wednesday last by Bob Wilson of the Clare Biodiversity Group.

Meanwhile, the Limestone pavement action plan was launched on Thursday evening during a Burren National Park walk hosted by Tony Kirby. Dr. Simon Berrow of the Clare Biodiversity Group will launch a Native Woodland action plan this Saturday during a 'walk in the woods' at the Vandeleur Walled Gardens in Kilrush. The launch of the Irish Pollan and Sand Dune Action Plans are scheduled for June and will be linked to relevant events.