



BirdWatchIreland
protecting birds and biodiversity

birdwatchireland.ie

2020 Vision

A forward strategy for BirdWatch Ireland 2010-2020



Foreword

Few would disagree that birds and biodiversity in this country are under more pressure now than ever before despite our nation's sign up to European Directives which are meant to protect our natural heritage. In contrast to many of our EU partners, this protection has neither been embraced politically nor fully implemented in Ireland. Many of our systems and approaches to things like planning and energy are broken, damaged or damaging to our natural environment. Underlying all of this is a persistent national attitude problem that perversely fails to recognise the value of our natural heritage in the same way that we cherish our historic and cultural heritage. On top of this we have the very real challenge of climate change and its impacts on birds and people to contend with.

It is against this backdrop that we in BirdWatch Ireland present *2020 Vision*: a forward strategy for the organisation that seeks to be both visionary and practical. We have ambitious long term objectives for nature conservation in this country, but alongside these comes a carefully planned strategy for delivering real change, with the support of our members, branches and partners. This strategy outlines short term priorities for our work over the next few years but, critically, places these within the context of a long term vision. Flexibility and adaptability are integral to our planning as we respond to emerging threats and opportunities such as those presented by climate change.

Not surprisingly, *2020 Vision* places bird protection at the very heart of our mission, but it also emphasises the increasing need to work on the environment and habitats that support birds and the myriad biodiversity that they depend on. BirdWatch Ireland will continue to grow in its role as a strong and influential voice for nature conservation in Ireland.

The organisation itself must ride our current economic reality and come through in better shape to fight for a future for birds and the environment. To that effect we also plan for building BirdWatch Ireland's capacity to work on our conservation challenges and, in particular, to place our people at the heart of our operation. Our staff, volunteers, branches, members and supporters are vital to our future. Growing our membership and support to increase our voice for birds and biodiversity is essential.

Finally, our vision is not just intended for BirdWatch Ireland: our aim is that it should be embraced by everyone with a love and appreciation for nature and our environment in Ireland. I encourage you to study it, and to speak to us: we will listen to your thoughts and fears and hopes for the natural environment in Ireland and in turn, we will harness your effort, commitment, information and ideas to help protect birds and biodiversity.



John Cromie
Chairman, BirdWatch Ireland



Plans with purpose

the role of our strategy

Why do we need a strategy?

A strategy for the next 10 years (to 2020) and a vision far beyond that is needed to steer a clear path through the many challenges that lie ahead. These include changing climate, socio-economic and land use changes, pressure for recreation space and economic development, a need to improve wildlife protection, a need for better information on our birds and biodiversity and the critical need for widespread recognition that conserving birds and biodiversity is good for people and benefits the economy too.

Why now?

BirdWatch Ireland has passed its 40th year and in 2010 sees more urgent conservation needs than at any other time in its history. This, in conjunction with the new economic reality in this country, means there is no better time to plan, and impart a sense of urgency to our work.

How have we worked out our strategy?

Our staff comprises a team of professional conservationists, scientists, communicators, managers and administrators with hundreds of years of experience between them. They bring experience and knowledge of all our work areas, with many having gleaned experience from time with other organisations in Europe, our BirdLife International partners and state bodies, in business and public service. Small targeted teams worked on key themes with input from our Board at an early stage. In addition, we have listened to our members, our partners and the many organisations that we work with on a daily basis.

This strategy is the result of that collective thinking and analysis together with the aspirations, drive and commitment of our staff and supporters alike.



Measuring our progress

the role of our strategy

Our past progress

Birdwatch Ireland has passed its 40th year. We have had significant conservation successes and remain the largest wildlife based charity in Ireland.

Success has been built through the hard work of volunteers and staff over the past four decades, these successes include: Roseate Tern conservation, the establishment of the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve, the East Coast Nature Reserve, the Annagh Marsh and Termoncarragh reserves. We originated Corncrake research and conservation work in Ireland and have well established national bird monitoring programmes like the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS), the Countryside Bird Survey (CBS) and the Bird Atlas in partnership with others. We have grown our supporter base to over 14,000 members and more than 20 branches. We deliver professional ornithological research, survey and monitoring, habitat management and advisory work, policy advocacy and more recently environmental education. Our staff include internationally recognised experts on seabirds, estuary, wetland and farmland birds and have established new areas of expertise like riparian birds and upland birds and birds of prey.

Despite our past efforts, Irish birds, biodiversity and habitats are under continued threat and we need more effort than ever if we are to prevent further losses and restore that which has been damaged

What other plans and strategies guide our work?

This is not the only guiding document we use: we already have a variety of action plans, project plans, policy priorities, reserve management plans, education plans and many more which are vital in informing and guiding our day-to-day work. These are sound, sensible and targeted, and often drawn up in partnership with other stakeholders. Our organisational strategy, however, provides direction and priorities for all of our work within an overall long term framework.



Beyond 2020 Vision

a long term vision for Ireland's birds and biodiversity

BirdWatch Ireland will continue to focus on bird conservation and will use all tools available to further conservation efforts, especially habitat and species management and restoration, re-introduction, reserves, casework, advisory, advocacy and media work, campaigns and appeals.

By 2020, further loss of biodiversity will largely be halted and by 2050 populations of birds will be either restored to all suitable areas or well on the way to recovering former numbers and range. Many birds not breeding regularly since before 1950 will have recolonised or been successfully reintroduced. Some species affected by climate change may have gone but some will persist through management that will restore habitats to the best possible condition. Climate change will also result in the arrival of new species such as Hobby and Cattle Egret.

Our research and monitoring will increase our knowledge of birds, their populations and their changing needs. Our surveys will record substantially healthier populations of priority birds; Corncrakes will have re-populated many parts of their former range, Corn Buntings will have come back through reintroduction and other species will benefit from more sustainable farming. Extensive restored wetlands will hold Bittern, Marsh Harrier and Black-necked Grebes and will help reduce summer floods in places like the Shannon Callows, allowing waders to breed successfully on the flower-rich meadows. The reintroduction of Golden and White-tailed Eagles will have succeeded and Red Kites will spread along with the expansion in range of Buzzards. All of these species will benefit from a persecution-free environment. Habitats in the uplands will benefit from a more sustainable approach to their management, with birds like Red Grouse, Golden Plover and Curlew responding positively.

BirdWatch Ireland's nature reserves will be managed to provide the best examples of key bird habitats in Ireland and will provide a real contribution to priority species conservation. They will, where practicable, provide natural places for people to enjoy wildlife and will attract visitors, in many areas becoming a significant contributor to local economies. In addition, they will be utilised for education and by 2050 most Irish schoolchildren will visit a BirdWatch Ireland reserve as part of their education. BirdWatch Ireland local branches will play an important part in managing these reserves.

...(continued)



Beyond 2020 Vision

a long term vision for Irelands birds and biodiversity

Our politicians and decision makers will put biodiversity and sustainability at the heart of their decisions on planning and economics. They will understand the benefit that biodiversity brings to social well-being and to our economy. Tourism will benefit from those coming to see our wildlife spectacle; the thronging seabird cliffs, wild uplands with impressive raptors, vast wetlands with awe-inspiring flocks of waterbirds and western meadows rich in birds and flowers. The planning system will ensure a safe future for our special places, a more sustainable approach to the use of all our countryside and will take account of issues in our vital marine areas. Farming will be well supported to provide a wildlife-rich environment as a priority within sustainable food production, keeping farms in business in a sustainable way. The state will take the lead in properly managing Ireland's most special sites: those designated for priority birds and habitats. BirdWatch Ireland will be listened to, be a trusted partner, advocate and advisor and will have great positive influence in decision-making on environment and rural matters.

We will have established further successful and consistent approaches to bird conservation and monitoring throughout the island of Ireland by working in close partnership with RSPB Northern Ireland and the BTO. Further afield, we will have established successful conservation initiatives with BirdLife International partners and others in countries outside Ireland where Irish birds spend part of their life cycle and where conservation effort is required.

More people will see birds and a healthy natural environment as relevant to their lives and well-being. They will see the benefit of the restoration of wildlife communities and natural places in having better defences from flooding and sea-level rise, cleaner water for drinking and bathing, cleaner air, a more sustainable rural economy and a higher quality of life. Some of the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change will have been mitigated through conservation efforts like coastal realignment, better fisheries management, woodland re-establishment and restored floodplains.

The children of 2010 will see their children growing up in 2050 in a country rich in birds and wild places.



The Challenge Ahead

our strategic priorities 2010 - 2020

Strategic themes

This is the main section of our strategy outlining our main strategic priorities for the next 10 years.

The priorities are grouped into strategic themes which illustrate our key work areas and within these are outlined our primary goals. There are a number of issues taken into account which are broad, touch most work areas and which will be widely considered and tackled by the strategic priorities but which may not be apparent in our stated aims or actions. These issues include: climate change, ecosystem services, agriculture and fisheries support mechanisms, legislation and planning, socio-economic trends, cultural values and attitudes to birds, funding climate, biodiversity conservation, data deficiencies, partnerships, Ireland within Europe and as one island.

The themes are:

1. Action for nature | *species and habitat conservation for Ireland's Birds*
2. Understanding Ireland's birds | *research, survey and monitoring to inform conservation action*
3. Birds for people | *how birds and biodiversity are relevant to people's lives*
4. Places for nature | *developing our nature reserves*
5. People for nature | *developing support for birds and biodiversity*
6. Advocates for birds | *influencing policy, legislation and opinion*
7. Fit for the future | *managing the organisation effectively*



Theme 1

Action for Nature

Species and habitat conservation for Ireland's Birds

This is a major work area. Our core approach to the conservation of birds and their habitats is outlined. This work lies at the heart of the organisation and aims to ensure that our vision of halting declines and restoring declining or lost bird populations starts here. It also focuses on ensuring that decision makers understand the value of birds and that our country's legal framework, systems and enforcement are fit to protect our birds and their habitats.

We will:

- formulate action plans for priority species by the end of 2013
- promote a sound approach to further designation of important sites including their management
- engage with key management groups relevant in influencing land and species management
- establish an advisory service to provide farmers, local authorities and state agencies with conservation advice and training
- utilise our reserves and project areas as demonstration sites of best practice
- work with partners to formulate a national strategy for wildlife adaptation to climate change and the role of ecosystems for helping human adaptation
- advocate and develop new initiatives for farmland birds through High Nature Value land use and new agri-environment measures with partners in farming and landowning groups

- in partnership, tackle issues of invasive alien species such as mink, where they threaten priority birds and habitats
- work with other partners, statutory agencies and an Garda Síochána to improve wildlife legislation and tackle wildlife crime, particularly poisoning
- take major action through policy advocacy, research and land management initiatives for the most critically declining or lost species notably:

Seabirds
Greenland White-fronted Goose
Corncrake
Breeding waders
Farmland birds
Red Grouse & other upland birds
Birds of prey



Theme 2

Understanding Ireland's Birds

Research, survey and monitoring to inform conservation action

Despite a successful and continuing programme of bird surveys and research there are still major deficiencies in our knowledge of Irish birds. It is not as simple as taking information from other countries and transposing it to Ireland. The ecology of many of our birds is different, we have a range of different habitat types and land use patterns and a different climate envelope. As a result, many species differ in their ecology and thus in their trends and conservation status. We need to ensure we have adequate data on our own birds to facilitate key decisions for bird conservation.

We will:

- maintain, establish or support our partners with long term monitoring of all major bird groups including seabirds, waterbirds, raptors, upland, farmland, woodland and garden birds
- establish monitoring of dispersed and specialist species and species groups in conjunction with partners
- improve and integrate data collection on life histories of birds including productivity, survival and movements, to better understand the factors involved in bird population change
- establish climate change research relevant to Irish birds
- develop a range of bird indicators based on results from core monitoring, including farmland bird and “quality of life” indicators
- establish a means of independently monitoring site condition of IBAs, SPAs, RAMSAR sites and our own reserves

- seek funds for research on the ecology of the highest priority species, in particular, seabirds (including interactions with fisheries and climate change), birds in the wider countryside (and the effect of agri-environment measures) and predator-prey interactions
- devise research to determine the ecology and conservation status of Irish endemic sub-species like the Jay and Coal Tit
- work in partnership with Northern Irish organisations to provide an all-Ireland approach to monitoring our bird populations
- promote the uptake of amateur ornithological research through providing support, advice and a publishing avenue through *Irish Birds*
- seek funds for collaborative conservation-based research at an international level on migratory waterbirds like Greenland White-fronted Goose and African migrants like Spotted Flycatcher



Theme 3

Birds for people

How birds and biodiversity are relevant to people's lives

This is vital for the development of the organisation and its mission, reaching out to show people birds and enthuse them to support nature conservation in many different ways. Birds are very relevant to our quality of life from the song of the Skylark to the arrival of swallows in spring or geese in winter. Birds form the visual and audio backdrop to our time in the countryside whether we live there or visit. Important bird habitats provide real ecosystem services like flood alleviation, water quality and supply soft coastal defences. Birds are intertwined with Irish folklore and form part of our heritage just as much as our music, culture and history.

We will:

- provide opportunities in cities and visitor sites to enthuse people about birds through viewing, and interpretation of birds in public places
- provide people with great opportunities to see birds and other wildlife on our reserves and in other special places, working with tourism providers and communities to deliver high quality wildlife experiences
- help people to build their enjoyment of birds through opportunities for learning and training
- build survey skills amongst birdwatchers to increase survey participation through provision of training and workshops, better methods including more online submission
- raise our media presence making people more aware of BirdWatch Ireland's work and offer everyone an opportunity to support our work

- support and broaden the scope of our branch network, enabling branches to play an even bigger role in the delivery of surveys, campaigns and conservation action as well as improving benefits for branch members
- develop a programme of lifelong learning opportunities to enthuse and educate children and adults about birds and the environment
- comment on topical issues for birds and biodiversity through popular media to increase awareness among a wider audience
- develop a range of publications in a variety of media particularly online and electronic to enable people to gain greater access to information and services related to birds and biodiversity



Theme 4

Places for nature

Developing our nature reserves

Nature reserves are the jewels of nature conservation, the places which put nature first and where bird populations are able to be built from. They can play a vital role in demonstration, advisory and research work, in showing people birds and wildlife and in many cases protecting species with restricted range or concentrated populations. Our aim for our nature reserves is to make them better for birds and biodiversity, better as places for people to enjoy and better for demonstrating best practice. Reserves cost money and can be expensive to run. To achieve our aims we must build our reserves portfolio sustainably, utilising community involvement and support together with cost effective land management.

We will:

- establish baseline data and monitoring of birds and other biodiversity on all our reserves
 - determine management objectives for all priority species and habitats on our reserves
 - implement management to enhance priority habitats and species on all of our reserves
 - enhance our reserves network through the acquisition of new reserves and reserve extensions where they meet our conservation and people engagement priorities
 - establish a series of flagship reserves for priority habitats and species to act as demonstration sites and key refuges
 - establish more reserves with significant visitor facilities close to Ireland's major cities where people can learn about and enjoy wildlife on their doorstep
- enable more people to become actively involved in managing our reserves through volunteering, monitoring and community engagement
 - we will undertake landscape scale habitat restoration projects incorporating reserves and other land management mechanisms in partnership with others where opportunities and conservation priorities overlap including the restoration of cutaway bogs



Theme 5

People for nature

Developing support for birds and biodiversity

By our very nature as a membership based organisation we depend on the support of people to enable us to make a real difference for birds. To achieve our vision in the long term, increasing this support will be vital. We will need more members and donations from supporters, more volunteers, more proceeds from sales and more signatures and pledges on campaigns. To do this requires great care of our members and an engendering of commitment from volunteers, as well as clear and helpful communication with all our contacts and the public to ensure what we say or ask is well understood.

We will:

- increase our membership to help support our work and give a greater voice for birds and biodiversity
- develop new ways for non-members to support our work through participation or giving
- work to ensure our members and supporters receive an excellent experience through good service, high quality communications and publications.
- provide opportunities for members and supporters to engage with us through our website, social media and at events, enabling them express their support effectively by supporting our campaigns, appeals and surveys and to feedback views and information to help us improve
- provide high quality products through our shop and online sales and develop this further to provide an excellent service with profits ploughed back into conservation work.
- provide an opportunity for charitable donors to support our work through large and small donations, legacies and bequests which show how their funds are put to best use
- ensure we are recognizable, contactable and approachable through care in the services provided by our website, social networking, publications, signage and products
- develop the BirdWatch Ireland brand so that it, and what we stand for, is instantly recognised in this country.



Theme 6

Advocates for birds

Influencing policy, legislation and opinion

We cannot achieve work on the ground without change at a policy level both nationally and in some cases, internationally. The decisions that our politicians, local authorities and other decision makers take affect birds and our natural environment profoundly. These policy and planning decisions should be well informed, take an approach that ensures that nature is taken full account of and have a view to long term sustainability. We aim to ensure that we are listened to, and to engage at all levels to influence decisions in a way that will benefit birds, biodiversity and our natural environment and thus enable people to enjoy the benefits of a healthy natural environment with abundant and diverse wildlife.

We will:

- ensure our policy advocacy is strategic, well planned and targeted through short- and long-term programmes and campaigns
- raise capacity for casework by recruiting and training staff, volunteers and branches
- best use our link to BirdLife International to bring additional capacity and influence to help us achieve our advocacy goals
- employ research as a strong evidence base for advocacy and to test policy mechanisms
- advocate major improvements to national legislation and the policy framework where it relates to birds and biodiversity
- monitor the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives and feed back relevant findings to the EU to ensure appropriate enforcement action is taken

- engage in policy development by national and European policy makers including inputs to CAP, Natura, CFP and RDP in partnership with Birdlife International
- engage members, supporters, branches and the public in our campaigns and other advocacy activities to express public opinion on issues that matter for birds and biodiversity
- maintain a non-party-political stand point influencing all politicians and decision makers to include birds and biodiversity within manifestos, policies and decisions
- show the link between wildlife and people and advocate an ecosystem services approach to find natural solutions to problems like flooding and water quality



Theme 7

Fit for the future

Managing the organisation effectively

We cannot deliver themes 1 to 6 without an organisation that is fit for purpose. Some of our energy must go into ensuring that we build and manage our resources well. We also need to lead by example and show that sustainability cannot be left to others. Greening our operation should bring cost effectiveness as well as a reduction in carbon. Often, our delivery is most effective when in partnership, we cannot do it all ourselves and our approach to partnerships must develop to be sound and helpful both for our own mission and that of our partners. Not least, we should look at our own structures, how we manage and control our resources and build in checks and balances that ensure an effective operation, good oversight by our Board, a safe, sound and enjoyable work and volunteering environment and a shared vision for our future.

We will:

- review our management structure and procedures for Board, staff, volunteers and branches and implement improvements where necessary
- continue to enhance the awareness and knowledge of our Board in our key work areas to ensure sound oversight and direction
- improve the skills and competencies of our staff to meet new conservation, development and operational challenges
- enhance opportunities for volunteers and branches to help deliver in key work areas
- build better recognition of our brand to ensure members, the public, the media and decision makers are aware of what we do and what we stand for

- improve our communications amongst staff, with members and supporters and with wider audiences
- seek to increase our income, giving us a better ability to fund our own work for priority birds
- be better partners and engage with a wider range of partners to deliver our (joint) priorities
- “green” our operation through audit and annual carbon and waste reduction programmes



Partnership is the key

Working with our natural partners

BirdWatch Ireland is not alone in believing that bird and biodiversity conservation is important. Other bodies and individuals like nature conservation organisations, state agencies, government departments, landowners, farmers and businesses see real value in birds, biodiversity and a healthy natural environment. This can be for a wide variety of reasons and with a diverse range of motivations. Nonetheless, those who have a duty, role or desire to help us protect and enhance our wildlife are welcome partners.

Partnership working brings a range of benefits to our work, funding is always welcome but partners can often bring other resources like staff, information or skills, technical solutions, better communications through creating a louder voice and often viewpoints that help make our work better grounded, able to avoid pitfalls and exploit opportunities. Much of our simply could not be achieved without our partners.

Many partners already successfully work with BirdWatch Ireland but there are many more that have a natural affinity with us, strong mutual interests or a purpose closely allied to ours. Some may simply have work that they feel can benefit from our involvement. In any of these cases, we welcome partnerships, old and new.

Some of our current and potential partners

- Birdlife International
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- The Heritage Council
- National Biodiversity Data Centre
- The Forest Service
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
- Irish Environmental Network (IEN)
- An Taisce
- Irish Raptor Study Group
- Golden Eagle Trust
- Local Authorities

- Farming/landowning representative groups
- Fisheries & aquaculture representative groups and research agencies
- Angling bodies
- Outdoor recreation bodies
- Bord na Móna
- Coillte
- Corporate bodies in fields like energy, tourism, media, communications and food and bird care
- Fáilte Ireland
- Local authorities
- Universities & other educators



What you can do

Help us deliver our strategy

- Become a member or tell a friend about our work so that they might join us
- Donate time, effort or funds, participate in our work as a volunteer, through a branch or by supporting a campaign or appeal
- Understand that we wish to make a positive difference for birds AND for people
- Trust that we will do our best to deliver on our promises and to keep trying if the going gets tough
- Recognise this as a dynamic approach with regular review – we welcome your feedback to help us continually improve our work

Contact us:

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Further Reading/Links

Why birds Count - Policy and Advocacy Priorities for BirdWatch Ireland (BirdWatch Ireland 2008)

Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2008-2013 (RSPB/BirdWatch Ireland 2008)

www.birdwatchireland.ie/ourwork

www.birdlife.org

www.birdlife.org/worldwide/national/ireland/index.html



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Picture credits

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Page 3: Great Black-backed Gull, Ringed Plover (Alan Lauder)

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Page 6: Red-throated Diver (Ken Kinsella), Lapwing (Anthony McGeehan), Little Egret (Clive Timmons)

Page 7: Teal flock (Paddy Dwan), Robin (Clive Timmons), kids birdwatching (John Lombard)

Page 8: Curlew (John Carey), Corncrake (Eddie Dunne), Red Kite (John Carey)

Page 9: data in notebook (Alan Lauder), Kittiwake (Billy Clarke), Ringed Plover nest (Andrew Kelly)

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Page 12: Hillwalkers (Siobhán Egan), Hen Harrier chick (Alan Lauder), dawn chorus walk (Oran O'Sullivan)

Page 13: Forestry (Siobhán Egan), tractor ploughing (BirdWatch Ireland), windfarm (Siobhán Egan)

Page 14: fencing (Kathryn Finney), conservation meeting (Siobhán Egan), waymarker (Siobhán Egan)

Page 15: survey advice (Oran O'Sullivan), Golden Eagle (John Carey), fishing gear (Siobhán Egan)

Page 16: Puffin over sea pool (Shay Connolly)

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