

A Manifesto for Nature

Proposals to address the Biodiversity
and Climate Emergency in Ireland



BirdWatchIreland
protecting birds and biodiversity

Ireland is in an unprecedented biodiversity and climate emergency. We need a sea change in the national response to it.

1. Establish a sound pathway to halt and reverse biodiversity loss

Establish immediately the Citizens' Assembly to address biodiversity loss as per the Dáil declaration of a climate and biodiversity emergency on May 9th 2019. The time for lip service is over. We cannot delay any further and we must act together to save nature in Ireland.

Set a legally binding target that at least 30% of Irish land and sea areas is primarily managed for nature by 2030. This would include all EU and national designated areas, areas yet to be designated and include new areas to be managed for a range of species and habitats and ensuring connectivity in the landscape. **Ensure robust enforcement of national and EU legislation.**

By 2030 restore at least 15% of terrestrial habitats and seas especially those with high carbon storage and sequestration potential such as peatlands, semi-natural grasslands and old growth woodlands as well as habitats that are globally rare in Ireland (e.g machair) and important marine habitats.



To fill the critical gaps in knowledge of important bird species, and in conjunction with BirdWatch Ireland, resource and implement a survey and monitoring programme to inform conservation needs.

Urgently develop recovery plans for key Red and Amber listed Birds of Conservation Concern including for example Curlew representing farmland birds, wintering waterbirds and breeding seabirds **to reverse devastating declines.**

Meaningfully **increase the core funding from government to environmental NGOs such as BirdWatch Ireland** to enable us to undertake our work as advocates and advisors to Government on nature conservation, and to continue work on education, awareness raising, and engaging people in outdoor citizen science projects.

Increase the budget for the National Parks and Wildlife Service to €100 million annually (currently in receipt of approximately €15 million annually whereas €80 million is annually allocated to horse and greyhound racing) to protect the nation's biodiversity. Establish a Department of Nature and Climate Action to address both these existential threats.

Create new national legislation to protect hedgerows. Hedgerows are extremely valuable habitats including for wildlife, for sequestering carbon and are treasured by people but they are afforded minimal protection. **The establishment of a national Hedgerow Conservation Forum of stakeholders would underpin their future conservation and management.**

Repeal Sections 7 and 8 of the Heritage Act (2018) which removes oversight of local authorities on road-side hedgecutting and would allow burning in the uplands in March which will impact breeding birds and is not in line with EU nature legislation.

2. Deliver robust climate action

Deliver a national net zero target in law. Support a new EU 2030 target of 55% to 65% emissions reductions and ensure emissions reductions to reach 8% a year during the lifetime of the next Government with all sectors doing their fair share.

Continue established commitments to fund and restore raised bogs and develop a National Blanket Bog Management Plan following in the same footsteps of the National Raised Bog Management Plan which sets in place a resourced plan to rewet and restore blanket bog.

Require that the rehabilitation of the Bord na Móna complex of peatland sites is carried out under best international practice for biodiversity (especially including birds) and climate change mitigation and supporting jobs in the midlands and tourism.

Develop continuous cover forestry policy and afforestation with the right trees in the right place under the right management focusing on majority of native tree species underpinned by ecological assessment of land to be planted and **to avoid High Nature Value farmland.**

Ensure that the deployment of renewable energy infrastructure is planned in a strategic way and avoids important sites for birds and habitats.

Ensure that any future terrestrial wind strategies refer to the BirdWatch Ireland Bird Wind Sensitivity Mapping Tool. Support the development and roll out of the offshore renewable energy sensitivity mapping tool in all Irish waters in order **to protect seabirds and waterbirds.**

Prepare our coastlines and communities for the impacts of climate change using nature-based solutions, such as managed realignment, restore coastal wetlands and establish new ones, salt marshes and mudflats and increase our blue carbon opportunities.



3. Develop a new food and agriculture policy

Develop a food and agriculture policy which is in line with climate, biodiversity and water legal obligations and objectives and within ecological boundaries; which improves national food security and sovereignty increasing horticulture and tillage, supporting soils and critically supporting farmers in **a just transition** away from predominantly livestock production while safeguarding High Nature Value farming.

Develop proposals where High Nature Value farming is given robust support ensuring that premia are attractive enough to support good livelihoods for farmers and to attract new entrants.

Enshrine a 'polluter pays' principle in agriculture policy where public money (ie Common Agriculture Policy payments) goes to public non-polluting goods and also establish a **cap on nitrogen fertiliser usage** and pesticides. **Eliminate the derogations** under the Nitrates Directive in order to protect water quality.

Ensure that at least 10% of all agricultural land is supported as 'Space for Nature'.



Cover: Kingfisher
by Tom Ormonde

P.2: Barn Owl
by Mike Brown

P.3: Large Carder Bee
by John Breen

P.4: Golden Plover
by Ken Kinsella

Advocate for agriculture policies that pay for biodiversity as public goods. Roll-out the excellent European Innovation Partnerships with a focus on results-based actions in CAP post 2020 so that all farmers can access these schemes in their locality.

Establish a network of specialist ecological advisors to support farmers farming with biodiversity in mind and agri-environment scheme measures.

Ensure that Teagasc agricultural courses include options for diversification of farm businesses and that biodiversity, climate change and water quality are afforded substantial focus within courses. Ensure Teagasc farm advisors receive training in ecology.

4. Protect our seas for nature and people

Designate 30% of Irish waters as a coherent network of Marine Protected Areas underpinned by scientific rationale.

Designate 15% of Ireland's Exclusive Economic Zone as a no-take zone for fisheries restoration and safeguard future fishing potential.

Fully implement the EU's Common Fisheries Policy ensuring that annual Total Allowable Catches follow scientific advice, take mixed fisheries and ecosystem considerations into account and have Maximum Sustainable Yield as the upper limit.

Fully implement the EU's landing obligation, ensuring an end to the banned practice of discarding fish at sea and ensure stock recovery plans are developed and implemented for overfished stocks.

Establish Fisheries Natura Plans for all commercial fisheries in all marine Natura 2000 sites, ensuring full compliance with the Birds and Habitats Directives.

Improve the monitoring and protection of forage fish species such as sprat, sand eels and herring which are an important food source for commercially important fish stocks, seabirds and cetaceans.

Contact info@birdwatchireland.ie

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