

BirdWatchIreland
protecting birds and biodiversity

BirdWatch Ireland Strategic Plan 2024-2030



Partnership for
nature and people

FOREWORD

Birds are indicators of the health of our planet and all signs point to an urgent need for their emergency care.

Species considered common just a few decades ago have now become rarities, the sight and sound of them now largely confined to stories and memory. Indeed, two-thirds of our regularly occurring wild bird species are now Red or Amber-listed Birds of Conservation Concern. While the situation is serious and many challenges lie ahead, not least those presented by the climate crisis, we at BirdWatch Ireland know that change is possible. We envision a future in which birds and wildlife flourish, and their intrinsic value as well as their value to environmental and human health, and the economy, is fully understood and appreciated. This is an ambitious vision but one that is rooted in our many success stories.

Since our establishment, we have seen how our work can deliver impact when grounded in the science and supported by communications, advocacy and the public getting behind it. Our Barn Owl work is a shining example of this. Rodenticide poisoning, road collision and habitat loss are just some of the many pressures that brought this iconic species to the brink of extinction in Ireland in recent decades. Informed by our research and monitoring, we have engaged with our partners in conservation initiatives that have helped to reverse their decline. Indeed, 2023 marked the best Barn Owl breeding season to date, with both the breeding productivity and the number of breeding pairs monitored surpassing all previous records.

Meanwhile, the latest and fourth “Seabirds Count” Census, which provides population estimates for the regularly breeding species of Britain, Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, highlighted how focused conservation management measures can boost populations. The encouraging trends in Ireland for species such as terns underscores the importance of our tern wardening work with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) at key colonies on the east and south-east coasts such as Rockabill, Kilcoole and Lady’s Island Lake.



Little Tern. Photo: BirdWatch Ireland.

FOREWORD

While the species mentioned have their own unique needs and vulnerabilities and consequently, require different conservation approaches, there is one common thread that runs through our success stories: community. Achieving positive change would simply not be possible without the hard work and dedication of a wide network of people across the country. Of course, this includes our staff, whose professionalism, expertise and commitment have positioned BirdWatch Ireland as a strong and influential leader for nature conservation in Ireland. Additionally, underpinning all we do at BirdWatch Ireland are our branch network, volunteers, members and partners, whose support allows us to cast our net much wider than we ever could alone. Indeed, our members in particular are the backbone of our organisation. Without the unrestricted funding we gain through membership, we would be unable to do the work that we do.

Our 2024 to 2030 Strategy outlines a clear roadmap for the organisation that seeks to be both visionary and practical. Our ambitious objectives in the areas of species, habitats, policy and advocacy are grounded in the latest science and the current legal and environmental context, while our people engagement objectives are shaped by and for the people who make our work possible. Finally, our organisational resilience objectives are underpinned by the need to achieve financial stability to secure BirdWatch Ireland's long-term future.

We wish to take the opportunity to thank all who were involved in the development of this Strategy, including RSPB for very generously providing funding and in-person support for a residential strategy workshop for some staff and Board Directors, BirdLife International for providing a facilitator for said workshop, branch committee members who responded to our questionnaire and, of course, our committed staff. Securing healthy habitats for wild birds, halting losses and restoring populations is a monumental mission, one that has a role for each and every person across society. On reading our Strategy, we hope you will feel inspired, not only to support the work of BirdWatch Ireland, but to get directly involved in the work that we do.



Jim Fitzharris

Chairperson of BirdWatch Ireland



Red-necked Phalarope. Photo: Richard T Mills.

BACKGROUND

WHO WE ARE



BirdWatch Ireland is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland.

A registered charity established in 1968, arising from the merger of three long-standing Irish national organisations devoted to the study and conservation of Irish bird life, our aim is the conservation of wild birds and their natural habitats. We carry out conservation work to protect Ireland's birds, conduct important education and advocacy, survey and research work, manage nature reserves which protect threatened habitats and the wildlife that relies on them and produce a range of media to raise wider awareness of nature conservation in Ireland. We are proud to have a presence across the Republic of Ireland, with a headquarters in Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow. As we believe in the need for collective action when tackling environmental challenges and are passionate about inclusivity, we aim to engage as far and wide as possible.

Some of the ways in which we spread our message and inspire action include:

- ➔ Recruiting, retaining and supporting a passionate and expert staff who champion conservation through a variety of activities including species and habitat conservation, surveying and monitoring, environmental advocacy and public outreach and education.
- ➔ Liaising with our network volunteer-run branches around the country, whose committed members organise public events, outings and talks and participate in a wide range of conservation projects on a local and national basis.
- ➔ Communicating with and mobilising BirdWatch Ireland's growing membership base across the globe.
- ➔ Recruiting and coordinating a network of volunteers, who take on a variety of roles, from spearheading branch initiatives and doing manual work at reserves, to taking part in bird surveys and representing us at key national events.
- ➔ Compiling and distributing our magazines for members, *Wings* and *Bird Detectives*, monthly e-newsletter *eWings* and ornithological journal, *Irish Birds*.
- ➔ Developing an annual calendar of BirdWatch Ireland events and talks, along with participating in external events nationwide.
- ➔ Knowledge transfer and collaboration with individuals, community groups and farmers in communities around Ireland.

Our Mission

Our mission is to be a strong and influential leader for nature conservation in Ireland, one that takes action based on the latest scientific data and supports and inspires people to get involved in environmental protection.

Our Vision

An Ireland where birds and biodiversity flourish and their true value to environmental and human health, and to the economy, is fully understood and appreciated.



Yellowhammer. Photo: Colum Clarke.

Our Values

BirdWatch Ireland's values underpin how we interact with one another, our stakeholders and the work that we do. Our key values are:



Passion: Our passion for birds and wildlife drives us to work towards our vision of a future where the natural world is respected and cherished by all.



Honesty: Honesty and transparency underpin everything that we do, from conversations between colleagues to interactions with our stakeholders.



Respect: Our respect and appreciation for birds, wildlife and people inspires us to be leaders in environmental protection and to strive for excellence in everything we do.



Resilience: Recognising the many current and future challenges facing the environment, the economy and the non-profit sector, we are determined to remain strong and unwavering in our commitment to environmental protection.



Sustainability: We are committed to supporting where possible the principles of sustainable development.



Community: Creating a world where humans and wildlife thrive requires input from everyone and we aim to bring people together and empower them to create change where they can.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Through decades of conservation work, we understand that our actions can deliver a greater impact when we collaborate with those who share our values.

By committing funding and resources, sharing advice and expertise and spreading the BirdWatch Ireland message, our key stakeholders and dedicated members support us in building a better world for nature.

We are grateful for the ongoing support of a wide number of national and global authorities, organisations, groups and individuals, including:

- BirdWatch Ireland branches
- BirdWatch Ireland members
- BirdWatch Ireland volunteers
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM)
- The Heritage Council
- Corporate supporters including Dublin Port Company, Virgin Media, Kirby Group, and others too numerous to mention
- Local Authorities
- National and international organisations and networks that share our goals including Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), BirdLife International, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, the Irish Environmental Network, the Environmental Pillar, Fair Seas, Stop Climate Chaos and The Wheel
- National and local media



Partnership for
nature and **people**

BirdWatch Ireland is the Republic of Ireland partner of BirdLife International, the world's largest partnership of conservation organisations with over 120 Partners across the globe. BirdLife's mission is to protect and conserve birds and their habitats, and to ensure that nature is protected for future generations. BirdLife International uses evidence-based science to inform conservation action on the ground, and to influence the policy and decision making of governments and business leaders.

BirdWatch Ireland has faced a number of challenges in recent years. However, through confronting such challenges and working together to overcome them, we have emerged stronger than ever and are now in prime position to face the road ahead.

Like many charitable organisations, Covid-19 caused great difficulties for BirdWatch Ireland. The pandemic and the related restrictions led to the disruption of a number of our key projects and surveys, the cancellation of all of our fundraising and membership recruitment events and the temporary closure of the shop at our Kilcoole HQ. While these setbacks resulted in a significant shortfall in funding for BirdWatch Ireland's core conservation work, over time, we have managed to bring ourselves back to a healthy position. This recovery was no doubt aided by the increased public interest in and connection with the natural world that emerged during this period of disruption, and the huge amount of support that they showed for our organisation. Indeed, our Covid-19 Emergency Fundraising Appeal was one of our largest appeals to date, raising an incredible €103,000. We are grateful for the continued support of key stakeholders and members during this challenging time and wish to reiterate our unwavering commitment to the protection of wild birds and their habitats.

Public awareness of, and care for, nature has reached an all-time high in recent years, yet the conversion of this interest and care into a whole-of-government approach that will ensure nature recovery needs more widespread political commitment. Many wild bird species in Ireland are facing very serious pressures with some on the brink of extinction. The 2020-2026 Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI) assessment showed that 26 per cent of Irish bird species are now on the Red List, indicating the highest status of concern for their populations.

Their decline goes hand-in-hand with loss of, and damage to, habitats, a widespread issue, even in areas deemed protected for them. EU legislation like the Birds and Habitats Directives and national legislation including the Wildlife Act underpin the basic legal protections for wild birds, habitats, and the environmental assessments required to ensure that they are safeguarded. Compliance with these laws, and others, is essential and will assist in maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem health to combat the worst impacts of climate change. Unfortunately, while good laws exist for the most part, national implementation and enforcement of them is often inadequate. A 2023 European Commission report which assessed the measures established in Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds and their effectiveness in ten countries scored Ireland lowest across planning, implementation, site management, monitoring and conservation outcomes.

The effects of climate change are also having an impact and will continue to do so unless we cut emissions nationally and globally to ensure a safe future for all of us and wild birds. It is important also that national action to cut greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change doesn't create further problems for wild birds. Active restoration of habitats is an essential tool in the climate mitigation and adaptation toolbox. There has been some great progress in government projects to address biodiversity loss on farmland and the awareness of what farmers can do for nature is growing. However, some sectoral land use policies continue to undermine the good work being done. Better policy coherence coupled with a commitment to increased funding and staffing of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is a prerequisite to halt declines and restore wild bird populations.

Progress on new European and national legislation and policy on biodiversity and climate as well as the strong public care for nature give us a sense of cautious optimism, though nothing can be taken for granted. Through the continuation and expansion of our national surveys and active conservation work, we will continue to collect data on the health of bird populations to inform prioritisation and decision-making going forward. We will also continue to build alliances with farmers, foresters, fishers, hunters, and national and local government to address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. As we face the journey ahead, we look forward to working with our many stakeholders to change the trajectory for nature.

IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR BIRDS

Ireland has a diverse network of important habitats, from complex wetland systems and species-rich grasslands to blanket bogs and our few remaining native woodlands. Many of these habitats are particularly important for the threatened birds identified in Pillar 1. Some of the most important habitats are listed below.

WETLANDS

Ireland has an abundance of wetlands, both coastal and inland, where the numbers of birds surge each autumn with the arrival of thousands of migratory waterbirds. These birds – which include many species of waders, ducks, geese and swans – breed in northern latitudes and migrate southwards to spend the winter.

BirdWatch Ireland monitors these waterbirds through the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS), which sees over 400 skilled volunteers monitor wintering waterbird populations at their wetland sites each winter. The data collected through this survey has informed the designation of the network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in Ireland and continues to provide valuable insights into how waterbirds are faring.

COASTAL AND MARINE HABITATS

As an island nation, Ireland is home to a rich diversity of coastal and marine habitats. Our cliffs and islands are particularly crucial habitats for many of our priority nesting seabirds including Gannets, Kittiwakes, Puffins, European Storm-petrel and Roseate Terns.

Many of these sites support birds in internationally important numbers. For example, Rockabill Island off the coast of Dublin hosts 1,600 pairs of the rare Roseate Tern, making it the largest colony in Europe. Further west, Little Skellig in Kerry is renowned for its very large colony of some 35,000 pairs of Gannets – the largest breeding colony of the species in Ireland and amongst the largest in the world.

TERRESTRIAL HABITATS

A wide range of terrestrial habitats such as grasslands and other farmland habitats, peatlands and uplands support key species including Curlew, Hen Harrier, Lapwing and Yellowhammer. The invertebrates associated with these habitats also support aerial insectivores such as Swifts, Swallows and martins, while urban habitats are also critical for providing nest sites.



PROTECTED SITES NETWORK

BirdLife International has identified places of greatest significance to the conservation of wild birds. These are known as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Many of these IBAs are designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EU Birds Directive and are legally protected. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are areas selected and designated under the EU Habitats Directive to protect unique habitats and other species.

BirdWatch Ireland will continue to develop the IBA network and work with the government to strengthen and expand the existing protected sites network to include important marine areas and other key terrestrial sites.

There are many human activities affecting the health of Ireland's habitats and as a result, bird populations. These include continued agricultural intensification, peat drainage and extraction, afforestation and the increased encroachment of human leisure activities on sensitive habitats. We will work with communities and a wide range of stakeholders to reduce and mitigate the impacts of these activities on wild birds.



STRATEGIC GOALS 2024-30

The following pages offer an overview of BirdWatch Ireland's Strategic Goals for the 2024 to 2030 period.

These goals, along with the overall Strategy document, have been developed with the support and input of many others. Achieving them will also require continued support and collaboration from our stakeholders. We discuss this further in the 'Risks and Assumptions' section on page 27.

In early 2023, a questionnaire was sent out to all of our branches ahead of our Strategy development. Questions were posed to branches regarding their perception of BirdWatch Ireland's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, while views were also sought on the state of conservation in Ireland in general. Workshops facilitated by RSPB and templates provided by BirdLife International and RSPB also helped to shape the Strategy. The document was reviewed by the Board and sent out to both members and key partners for consultation in 2024.

The following pages outline our overall objectives and **a sample** of the activities we plan to carry out to reach them between 2024 and 2030. This offers a flavour of our ambitious plans for the upcoming years but is not the overall picture. Underpinning this public Strategy is a detailed operational plan which lays out in detail how we will meet each objective, and the time and resources we have allocated to each activity. Our progress against this operational plan will be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the CEO, Board and Senior Leadership Team.

BirdWatch Ireland's Strategic Goals fall under **four key pillars**:

Pillar 1: Bird Conservation

Pillar 2: Policy and Advocacy

Pillar 3: People Engagement

Pillar 4: Organisational Resilience

1. BIRD CONSERVATION: *Species*

Pillar 1 sets out the key species which will be the focus of our conservation work over the lifetime of the Strategy. From the Red and Amber lists of Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland, five groups, comprising 63 species, have been identified, which we will aim to protect and conserve through direct conservation action, monitoring, research and advocacy. Each species group has its own prioritised action plan. The following pages show a sample of some of the many actions we plan to carry out.



1. FARMLAND BIRDS

21 species: Cough, Corncrake, Common Scoter, Curlew, Dunlin, Golden Plover, Kingfisher, Lapwing, Meadow Pipit, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Red-necked Phalarope, Ringed Plover, Skylark, Snipe, Stock Dove, Teal, Tree Sparrow, Twite, Whinchat, Yellowhammer.



2. SEABIRDS

13 species: Arctic Tern, Common Tern, European Storm-petrel, Gannet, Guillemot, Herring Gull, Kittiwake, Little Tern, Manx Shearwater, Puffin, Razorbill, Roseate Tern, Sandwich Tern.



3. WINTERING WATERBIRDS

18 species: Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Golden Plover, Goldeneye, Grey Plover, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Mallard, Oystercatcher, Pintail, Pochard, Purple Sandpiper, Redshank, Ringed Plover, Scaup, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Turnstone, Wigeon.



4. RAPTORS AND UPLAND BIRDS

7 species: Barn Owl, Hen Harrier, Kestrel, Merlin, Red Grouse, Red-throated Diver, Ring Ouzel.



5. AERIAL INSECTIVORES

4 species: House Martin, Sand Martin, Swallow, Swift.

1. BIRD CONSERVATION: Species

	OBJECTIVE	WE WILL...	SAMPLE ACTIONS
1 FARMLAND BIRDS	Habitats supporting farmland birds are enhanced and populations show improved breeding outcomes.	Deliver targeted, effective agri-environment schemes.	Develop a measure for Lapwing breeding on tillage in agri-environment schemes.
		Improve our knowledge on the distribution and productivity of farmland birds through surveys and monitoring.	Design and implement a farmland bird monitoring scheme.
		Increase level of effective protection from predation to ground-nesting birds.	Maintain and expand the network of predator fences.
		Protect birds which require open landscapes from adverse land use change.	Work to establish better protections for key birds negatively affected by afforestation.
2 SEABIRDS	Seabird populations are better monitored and protected, to ensure they are more resilient to current and future threats.	Inform effective implementation of marine SPAs and IBAs.	Identify and develop projects to address data gaps for key seabird species.
		Continue and expand tern colony management to protect populations and improve our knowledge of survival rates and other demographics.	Manage Rockabill to improve productivity of Common and Roseate Terns.

1. BIRD CONSERVATION: *Species*

OBJECTIVE	WE WILL...	SAMPLE ACTIONS
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	Protect seabird colonies from predation.	Address predation issues on Lambay Island and Puffin Island.
	Enhance survey, monitoring and adult survival assessments for key species.	Establish annual monitoring sites for cliff nesting and burrow nesting seabirds.
	Reduce impacts of Avian Flu on breeding colonies.	More robust Avian Flu testing and management regimes are implemented.
3 WINTERING WATERBIRDS	Protect waterbird populations from current and future threats by ensuring that robust strategies are implemented.	Continue research into the risk of sea level rise and help develop mitigation measures to safeguard populations at site level.
	Research and highlight the implications of lack of management at key sites on wintering waterbirds.	Continue to identify high-tide roosts at risk from sea level rise and progress mitigation adaptations at site level.
	Continue, expand and improve the I-WeBS monitoring programme.	Further our research into the effects of disturbance.
		Continue to expand and upskill the I-WeBS volunteer network.

1. BIRD CONSERVATION: Species

OBJECTIVE

WE WILL...

SAMPLE ACTIONS

4

RAPTORS AND UPLAND
BIRDS

Mitigate the pressures and threats and improve the conservation status of raptor species in Ireland

Identify migratory routes and flightpaths and map sensitive areas.

Collate information and conduct research.

Ensure the provision of suitable habitat for Hen Harriers in SPAs and the wider countryside.

Protect important Hen Harrier breeding sites from land use change pressures including afforestation and disturbance caused by forest management activities.

Establish robust population estimates and trends for Merlins, improve our understanding of factors influencing their populations and advocate for targeted conservation measures including peatland restoration.

Design appropriate monitoring strategy for Merlins.

Continue monitoring Barn Owl populations.

Continue to implement conservation actions as needed and identified through monitoring to ensure the population continues to stabilise and recover.

Work to understand the impacts of rodenticide exposure in key raptor species (e.g. Kestrels and Barn Owls).

Inform policy requirements to reduce the impacts of rodenticide exposure to raptors.

1. BIRD CONSERVATION: *Species*

	OBJECTIVE	WE WILL...	SAMPLE ACTIONS
	Upland habitats are better protected and restored to improve the conservation status of upland birds.	Enhance the range and numbers of threatened upland birds through mitigating pressures in the uplands and habitat restoration.	Protect key breeding sites for Red-throated Divers to avoid disturbances and predation pressures.
5 AERIAL INSECTIVORES	Take action for aerial insectivores so that declining populations recover and expand.	Establish robust population estimates for all species.	Continue to build our knowledge on Swift populations and distribution.
		Identify areas where more research is required.	Liaise with research partners and key stakeholders.
		Protect existing colonies and nest sites.	Establish nest box schemes through a range of stakeholders e.g. community groups.

1. BIRD CONSERVATION

Science

Underpinning our work to protect key species in Pillar 1 are other areas of work such as volunteering and citizen science surveys (Bird Atlas 2027-31, Irish Garden Bird Survey), ringing and tagging and Cape Clear Bird Observatory. Our goal is to continue to be recognised as an effective, science-based organisation and a leader on citizen science projects for the protection of threatened bird species. The following pages show a sample of some of the many actions we plan to carry out in these areas.



BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN IN IRELAND

Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI) is an assessment of the conservation status of all regularly occurring birds on the island of Ireland. Through these assessments, our objective is to update the list of priority birds so that limited resources for their recovery can be targeted in the most effective way.



CITIZEN SCIENCE

BirdWatch Ireland hosts a number of citizen science surveys. These surveys help us to monitor Ireland's bird populations and in turn, inform conservation approaches. There are a range of bird surveys running throughout the year that volunteers of varying abilities can get involved in including the Irish Garden Bird Survey, the Countryside Bird Survey, the Irish Wetland Bird Survey, Bird Atlas and more.



CAPE CLEAR BIRD OBSERVATORY

Cape Clear Bird Observatory is located on Cape Clear Island in West Cork. It is one of Ireland's best known bird watching destinations, particularly for migration. Bird migration has been monitored and studied through the bird observatory since 1959. In addition, BirdWatch Ireland hosts wildlife weekends and birdwatching courses here.



RINGING AND TAGGING

Bird ringing and tagging by appropriately trained and licenced people is a key tool in gathering information about birds. It can be used to learn about their lifespan, survival rates, migratory movements and dispersal, and how they use certain areas during certain times in their life-cycle. Our staff ring and tag a large number of birds on an annual basis.



IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

BirdLife International has identified places of greatest significance to the conservation of wild birds. These are known as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). BirdWatch Ireland will continue to review and update the IBA network including, for example, the designation of marine IBAs. We will also work with the government to strengthen and expand the existing protected sites network.

1. BIRD CONSERVATION: Science

	OBJECTIVE	WE WILL...	SAMPLE ACTIONS
BOCCI	In partnership with RSPB Northern Ireland, continue to update Red and Amber lists for Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland.	Undertake long-term monitoring of birds in Ireland and use this and other data to assess conservation status.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver breeding and wintering Bird Atlas 2027-31. • Analyse data to produce species trends.
CITIZEN SCIENCE	Build robust scientific datasets through citizen science.	Engage members of the public to contribute data through participation in citizen science surveys including the Irish Garden Bird Survey, Irish Wetland Bird Survey, Countryside Bird Survey and Bird Atlases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and fill data gaps. • Recruit and train survey volunteers. • Communicate results and encourage use of data for research and conservation. • Secure funding through sponsorships, grants, donations.
CAPE CLEAR BIRD OBSERVATORY	As part of the British and Irish bird observatory network, continue operation of Cape Clear Bird Observatory to increase understanding of our resident and migratory species.	Undertake a programme of surveys, monitoring, ringing and education at Cape Clear.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue observation and recording activities such as the daily log. • Complete the ringing Constant Effort Scheme (CES) during the breeding season. • Continue to run a series of courses and wildlife events.
RINGING AND TAGGING	Continue to maintain and expand our technical expertise.	Maintain and expand the use of ringing, tagging and other technical methods to efficiently and effectively study key populations.	Provide opportunities for staff to acquire and improve ringing, tagging and other technical skills.

1. BIRD CONSERVATION: *Science*

	OBJECTIVE	WE WILL...	SAMPLE ACTIONS
IBAS	Contribute to the ongoing development of the BirdLife IBA network.	Update and review the IBA network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish marine IBA network for Ireland.• Update the terrestrial IBA database.

1. BIRD CONSERVATION: Reserves

BirdWatch Ireland maintains a network of nature reserves around the country. Pillar 1 of the Strategy sets out how we plan to ensure our reserves provide areas where birds and wildlife can flourish, while also serving as places for the public to visit and gain knowledge and inspiration from. The following pages show a sample of some of the many actions we plan to carry out for our reserves.

BirdWatch Ireland maintains a network of nature reserves around the country, all located in areas of conservation importance to birds and other wildlife.

These reserves contain a range of habitats, from rocky islands to saltmarshes and lakes through to woods and semi-improved grasslands, and host a diverse array of wildlife including many important breeding and wintering bird populations.

As pressure on natural habitats increases, reserves can ensure that some land is managed exclusively in the interests of threatened birds, habitats or wider wildlife. Our ongoing vision at our reserves is to restore, enhance, maintain and protect their bird populations with every effort made to protect other species and habitats.

Several of our nature reserves have infrastructure to help to facilitate the visitor experience. These include:

- East Coast Nature Reserve, Co. Wicklow – three observation hides and information boards.
- Sheskinmore Lough, Co. Donegal – observation hide.
- Rogerstown, Co. Dublin – two raised observation hides.
- Wexford Wildfowl Reserve – a Visitor Centre run by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) with wheelchair access, toilets and an audio visual display; an observation tower and two observation hides; information boards.



Map: C  il  n MacLochlainn.

1. BIRD CONSERVATION: Reserves

OBJECTIVE	WE WILL...	SAMPLE ACTIONS
<p>Ensure that our reserve network provides safe areas for birds and wider biodiversity.</p>	<p>Continue to build our knowledge of the occurrence and distribution of important species and habitats on our reserves.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with volunteers and relevant experts to undertake biodiversity surveys. Deliver an effective monitoring programme for key species and habitats.
<p>Ensure that our nature reserve network supports the delivery of our conservation objectives and protects key bird species .</p>	<p>Protect and where possible, enhance populations of the priority species occurring on reserves.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a plan that sets out how our Reserve network can deliver on our conservation objectives for priority species. Produce Conservation Management Plans for key reserves.
<p>Expand public awareness of our reserves and their importance for key species.</p>	<p>Work with our branch network, volunteers, corporate partners and other key stakeholders to increase public awareness of reserves.</p>	<p>Expand promotion of our reserves through our various communication channels.</p>
<p>Ensure that our reserve network provides infrastructure and information that supports and inspires people.</p>	<p>Take actions to ensure that our nature reserves are vibrant, interesting and, where appropriate, accessible spaces for people living in both nearby communities and further afield.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain or upgrade the present reserve visitor infrastructure. Strategically expand visitor information and facilities at key reserves. Continue to encourage and develop Branch involvement at reserve level.

2. POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Under Pillar 2, our key goal is to use the latest science to advocate for policies and practices that secure healthy habitats for wild birds, halt losses and restore populations. To amplify our messages and increase our impact, we will collaborate with those who share similar values including other non-governmental organisations and our members and supporters, and engage positively with other stakeholders and land and sea users. Below is a sample of some of our the actions we plan to carry out in this area.

OBJECTIVE	WE WILL...	SAMPLE ACTIONS
<p>Inform and shape agriculture and land use policies and practices with the aim of halting losses and restoring farmland bird populations.</p>	<p>Engage in meaningful and consistent dialogue with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, National Parks and Wildlife Service, BirdLife Europe and others on key agri-policy files to maximise benefits for wild birds and their habitats.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work at EU and national level to shape the next Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) post-2027 and ensure it reflects ecological needs of threatened wild bird species and supports farmers to restore nature. • Advocate for robust agri-environment schemes in Ireland's CAP response that deliver for nature and farmers.
<p>Ensure land use policies provide sufficient space and habitat restoration so that open country bird species can thrive.</p>	<p>Develop a policy position on land use to ensure open country bird species have sufficient habitat to thrive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with the Irish Forest Service on implementation of new forestry programme to ensure habitats for birds are protected and to ensure afforestation and forestry are positive for birds. • Engage in the National Land Use Review to ensure sufficient habitats for wild birds are protected.
	<p>Advocate for a robust and appropriately-funded national Nature Restoration Plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the national Nature Restoration Plan restores habitats for threatened wild bird species and includes other measures to restore populations. • Identify important peatland sites for threatened bird species and advocate for their protection and restoration.

2. POLICY AND ADVOCACY

OBJECTIVE	WE WILL...	SAMPLE ACTIONS
<p>Secure healthy marine ecosystems for seabirds and waterbirds.</p>	<p>Advocate for a robust network of marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to support seabirds and healthy marine ecosystems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a network of Marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs). • Engage with the Government on the designation of marine SPAs and MPAs. • Advocate for effective marine SPA and MPA management plans. • Work closely with key stakeholders to ensure renewable energy projects are guided by the latest science, minimising impacts on birds and their habitats.
<p>Advocate our messages to influence key decision makers and ensure the protection of threatened wild birds.</p>	<p>Seek to ensure that the State and other actors are compliant with the EU and national laws that protect wild birds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop key policy asks while also working with others (NGOs or other groups) to engage with Irish MEPs and the European Commission, TDs, Ministers etc. • Advocate that the Wildlife Act and Birds and Habitats Regulations are compliant with the Birds and Habitats Directives and management of SPAs is properly resourced. • Ensure that measures are in place to protect declining Red and Amber-listed species inside and outside protected sites.

3. PEOPLE ENGAGEMENT

Under Pillar 3, our key goal is to increase the number of individuals, groups and organisations who are engaged in our work and support us in working towards our vision. At BirdWatch Ireland, we are passionate about the power of collaboration. We recognise that our organisation can be even more impactful if we harness the interests, skills and platforms of others to help us to spread our vision. Below is a sample of some of our planned actions in this area.

OBJECTIVE

WE WILL...

SAMPLE ACTIONS

<p>Increase engagement and participation across our branch, member and volunteer network.</p>	<p>Develop a new member-informed communications plan for current and potential members and branches that better engages them in the work we do and encourages long-term involvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an annual rolling communications plan aimed at members and branches. • Build on best practice outlined in existing Volunteer's Handbook and identify wider opportunities for new and existing volunteers. • Branch Guidelines will be regularly reviewed on ongoing basis in consultation with Branch network. Regular branch meetings to be held.
<p>Enhance public awareness of our organisation and what we do by leveraging partnerships, connections and media presence.</p>	<p>Invest time in nurturing partnerships with our stakeholders and upskill relevant internal and external ambassadors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise staff media training on a rolling basis. • Create and embed internal media guidelines. • Create social media policy. • Develop digital materials to support corporate partners in promotion of BirdWatch Ireland. • Work with Policy team to develop and roll out campaigns that engage and mobilise public.
<p>Enhance staff capacity and capability and promote a culture of equality and inclusivity within the organisation.</p>	<p>Review Staff handbook to include updated key internal policies, invest in training in priority areas and outline pathways for job and pay progression to individual staff members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and develop a strategy to address pay and conditions. • Provide colleagues with ongoing comms training and team-building opportunities. • Review and communicate roles and responsibilities. • Fulfil staff training needs on an ongoing basis.

3. PEOPLE ENGAGEMENT

OBJECTIVE	WE WILL...	SAMPLE ACTIONS
<p>Build engagement and trust in new sectors, expanding perception of organisation as one working for a better future for people and nature.</p>	<p>Develop materials, events and courses that will support us in expanding our impact in the education sector.</p>	<p>Create Teacher Training initiative and roll out for remaining years of Strategy.</p>
	<p>Increase youth engagement in all aspects of BirdWatch Ireland's work.</p>	<p>Building on Social Media Policy, introduce new platforms and roll out campaigns to reach younger audiences.</p>
	<p>Build upon current and identify new opportunities to liaise with landowners, farmers, fishers and other key stakeholders.</p>	<p>Develop communication materials and conduct events according to demand and capacity.</p>

4. ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

Under Pillar 4, our key goal is to achieve financial stability to secure BirdWatch Ireland’s long-term future. As we emerge from a difficult period, one made ever the more challenging by a global pandemic, it is evident that financial stability underpins all of the work that we do. We aim to achieve this through two overarching actions: reducing overall costs and increasing unrestricted income. Below is a sample of some of our planned actions in this area.

OBJECTIVE

WE WILL...

SAMPLE ACTIONS

<p>Retain and build on BirdWatch Ireland's membership base.</p>	<p>Automate renewal processes, leading to an annual increase in overall members from 2024 to 2030 and time and money savings due to reduction in renewal letters sent to members.</p>	<p>Based on member survey results, build and deliver communications materials outlining cost-saving benefits of direct debit which will encourage new and current members to switch.</p>
<p>Continue to ensure that BirdWatch Ireland is getting the best value for money across all aspects of the organisation.</p>	<p>Review, negotiate and put out to tender as appropriate all running costs and also, ensure all staff complete project template and post-project evaluation process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review overheads, vehicle fleet and shop suppliers and make identified changes ahead of contract renewals. • Ongoing use of project templates and project evaluation to ensure maximum project cost recovery.
<p>Enhance organisational efficiency and maintain integrity.</p>	<p>Continue to improve our standardised procedures, systems, communications and training and ensure we meet governance and compliance guidelines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen organisational systems and processes. • Review of procedures, systems and training annually from 2024 to 2030.
<p>Build upon and refine existing sources of core funding.</p>	<p>Enhance membership recruitment and retention, fundraising and sponsorship, and develop existing funding streams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build and deliver communications plan to encourage donations. • Conduct reviews of land/ buildings and shop.

4. ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

OBJECTIVE

WE WILL...

SAMPLE ACTIONS

<p>Increase our number of corporate partners and sponsors.</p>	<p>Develop a fit-for-purpose Corporate Strategy and dedicate specific senior management time to corporate engagement.</p>	<p>Develop and implement Corporate Strategy and assign senior management time to corporate engagement.</p>
<p>Review available funding streams and develop new approach to income generation.</p>	<p>Dedicate senior staff time to reviewing, selecting and applying for relevant grant and funding opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate diaspora project into senior management time for lifetime of Strategy. • Develop Income Generation Strategy.

ASSUMPTIONS AND RISKS

The BirdWatch Ireland 2024-2030 Strategy outlines our organisation's priorities in the context of our long-term vision for birds and their habitats. Recognising the crises facing our natural world, we have set ambitious targets for the coming years. However, while we are committed to being a strong and influential leader for nature conservation in Ireland, our ability to achieve our goals is often contingent on factors outside of our control.

We have set out our objectives for the coming years based on the assumption that we will receive the funding required to fulfil them. However, we are acutely aware that our primary funding sources are changeable due to a variety of unpredictable influences. As the Covid crisis brought home all too starkly, we need to be prepared to face and adapt to unexpected challenges.

As a charity, most of our income sits in restricted funds, meaning that it can only be used for very specific purposes. This is largely due to us having tendered for and won specific projects that have been advertised externally. This high dependence on restricted funds places us in a vulnerable position. Should we stop winning tendered projects and/or, should key stakeholders such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) reduce the number of projects they fund, we may find ourselves unable to continue with certain aspects of our work. Additionally, a reliance on restricted funds makes it difficult for us to pivot and respond to new challenges as they emerge.

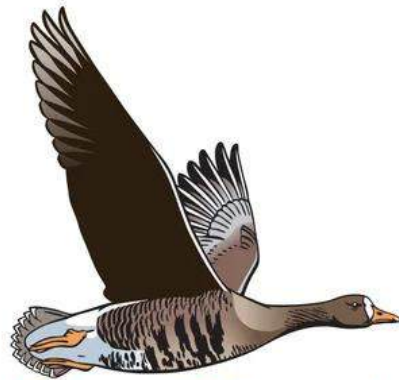
Accessing the IEN Core Funding grant is largely subject to an annual detailed application process and while, state funding for the environmental sector remains limited, the monies are gratefully received. Our core-funded staff have a range of responsibilities including finance, governance, compliance, communications and other administrative and leadership work. Many of these responsibilities have to be conducted in a way that meets audit and governance requirements, such as separation of duties, and their weight should not be underestimated. Core funding enables us to carry out some of this work but given its limitations, we continue to rely significantly on the generosity of our members, donors, and supporters to sustain our efforts.

We recognise that an organisation is as strong as the people within it and a lack of funding could put us at risk of losing some of our knowledgeable, experienced and dedicated staff members. Insufficient pay and conditions coupled with a heavy workload place us at risk of high staff turnover and difficulty in recruiting appropriately skilled replacements.

At BirdWatch Ireland, we are both proud of and grateful for the unwavering support of our members, funders and the general public. We do not take their trust for granted and know that one wrong move could lead to reputational damage and in turn, a loss of support. Recognising this, we aim to ensure that honesty and transparency underpin everything that we do, from conversations between colleagues to interactions with our stakeholders. There are other factors outside of our control that can affect the level of support we receive from the public. For example, an economic decline could potentially lead to a fall in membership and donations which, ultimately, would result in a lack of core funding and a lack of capacity within the organisation to deliver.

While we welcome the growing political support for nature and dedicated funding streams for environmental projects, we are cognisant that a change in leadership could bring this to a halt. Future political leaders must meet the current climate and biodiversity crises with a sense of urgency and continue to support appropriate environmental organisations and projects through meaningful actions as well as words.

We are working towards our vision of an Ireland where birds and wildlife flourish, and their true value to environmental and human health and community vitality is fully understood and appreciated. We cannot achieve this alone. We need people across the community to get behind us as we work towards a better future for birds.



BirdWatchIreland

protecting birds and biodiversity

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