

Lough Allen Farming and Wildlife project

Landowners Conservation Action programme

This work will be done under Part 2 of a Heritage Council funding scheme (Increasing Heritage & Conservation Awareness), if we are successful in our application for this. It consists of 3 elements.

- 1. A series of meetings with groups of Farmers/Landowners in March/April 2010**
- 2. One-to-one contacts and planning of conservation action and funding for specific species.**
- 3. A Landowners Conservation Contact group which will act as a support group.**

Nature Friendly Farming

We propose a series of 8 Meetings during the Spring on the theme of Farmers helping the Environment and the Wildlife project working with other Agencies to support Farmers who undertake such work. The most important players in this programme will be Farmers and Landowners who agree to participate in the programme, who make their land and plans available, and who will bring their local knowledge and experience to the table.

We will be providing a series of people experienced in such areas as Botany, Birdwatching, Organic Farming, Farm Development, Habitat management, etc. as our contribution to this dialogue, but it must be emphasised that the most important contribution will come from the landowners offering their services towards the conservation of Lough Allen's important wildlife.

Topics to be covered in these meetings could be as follows:

- 1. Significant Fauna and Flora of Lough Allen.**
- 2. What is 'habitat' and the varieties of habitat to be found around Lough Allen.**
- 3. Know your Land. Working off Maps we seek an outline of the Farm holdings of participants and then we add such plant and animal information we may have, particularly in regard to significant rarities.**
- 4. What the Landowners can do? Using the above data to work out Conservation Action Plans.**
- 5. Owls and Birds of Prey. Protection of new species that may be coming into the area.**
- 6. Growing grain for Birds. Identifying plots of land all around the lake where ½ hectare Oat and Linseed plots might be established to encourage biodiversity.**
- 7. Grants and Funding. Our scope to support non-commercial activity in conservation.**
- 8. Invasive species. List of harmful new species that are spreading in the area and the ways they can be controlled.**

Personnel

For the information delivery part of such meetings, which will be no more than half of each session, The Lough Allen Farming and Wildlife project will provide what information we have or which we can get, on the basis of adding differing experiences and skills to this 'working-together' initiative. For example there is experience of conserving that very rare plant, Irish Lady's Tresses, at Tommy Earley's farm in Mountallen. Also, Dr. Darach Lupton from the Botanic Gardens has all the techniques and expertise in working with this species

and has indicated a great willingness to share this knowledge with any landowners interested in taking on this work on their own lands. (This species occurs in significant pockets all around the lake; see Distribution Map included as Appendix A of our Policy Document which has also been uploaded.)

People providing environmental and funding information, therefore, might include Tommy Earley, Dr. Darach Lupton, REPS advisor, Sean McGloin, Bridget Keehan, NPWS, Birdwatch Irl. et al.

Conservation Contact Group

It is hoped that a Conservation Contact Group of people able and willing to participate in nature conservation, might come out of this dialogue. To make our dialogue interactive landowners will be invited to submit Maps during the series of meetings above and habitat, flora, and fauna data will be added to these maps. This will lead to the possibility of that farmer initiating conservation projects based on particular species of plant or animal. We can support such work by on-site visits to share our experience of conservation, maybe arrange a technical survey, and also start to investigate and evaluate funding methods for such work through REPS, Heritage Grants and (eventually) our own Lough Allen LIFE project.

The Lough Allen Farming and Wildlife project is very positive about this programme. For several years we have been wondering how to protect particular rare species in and around the Lake. Very high Summer water levels in recent years has made it hard to plan for conservation work on Irish Lady's Tresses and other rare plants. If we could predict the water level in any particular Summer, then our problems in conserving this species would be much simpler. We could apply for Heritage funding, and make a very strong case! However we can't predict the water levels, or even control them at this time but we do see an intriguing further possibility for this group of Farm Conservationists.

With local knowledge and equipped with specialised conservation knowledge, they could form a group that would swing into operation when a particular conservation opportunity arose. For example, we get a long dry Summer and the Orchids erupt, flower, and set seed. The Conservation Contact Group could get together and (with the permission of the landowner) rapidly install short term fencing around vulnerable clumps of Orchids. This would be temporary fencing to be removed in the Autumn. We would be optimistic that such a spirit of community conservation could be sponsored in return for help to each farmer in installing their own conservation programme and getting funding for that.

Submitted as Documentation for Heritage Grant Application 2: Increasing Heritage and Conservation Awareness.

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Tommy Earley, Project Manager
Increasing Heritage & Conservation Awareness programme
Lough Allen Farming & Wildlife project