

Galbally Tidy Towns

3 Year Biodiversity Action Plan
2018-2020



•

Prepared

By

Tony Kenneally B Sc

Wildlife Biologist

Contents

1.0 Introduction.....	3
2.0 Aims and Objectives of 3 Year Plan.....	3
3.0 Review of Actions to conserve, enhance & promote biodiversity.....	4
3.1 Control of Japanese Knotweed.....	4
3.2 Erection of bird nest boxes.....	5
3.3 Erection of bat boxes.....	7
3.4 Galbally Junior Tidy Towns.....,,.....	8
3.5 Rat poison and bird of prey awareness campaign.....	10
4.0 Project to conserve, enhance and raise awareness of Biodiversity	11
4.1 Development of an Ecology Park	11
4.2 Barn Owl nest box scheme	12
4.3 Biodiversity awareness measures	13

1.0 Introduction

This report was prepared by Tony Kenneally BSc, a qualified Wildlife Biologist, engaged by Galbally Tidy Towns to prepare a 3 year biodiversity action plan covering the period 2018-2020. This Biodiversity Action Plan is an update on the previous Biodiversity Action Plan 2014 which provided a detailed report on habitats and species within Galbally as well as recommendations to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

The objectives of this report are to review and evaluate actions that have been carried out by Galbally Tidy Towns over the previous 3 years to conserve and enhance biodiversity as well as measures to raise awareness of biodiversity within the community. The report also identifies some key objectives of Galbally Tidy Towns over the next 3 years to conserve, enhance and raise awareness of biodiversity.

2.0 Aims and objectives - 3 year Biodiversity Action Plan

The aims and objectives of Galbally Tidy Towns in relation to wildlife and natural amenities are:

- To conserve and enhance wildlife habitats and species within Galbally
- To actively involve the local community in wildlife/nature projects and events.
- To raise awareness and appreciation of wildlife amongst the people of Galbally

3.0 Review of actions to conserve, enhance & promote biodiversity.

3.1 Control of Japanese Knotweed

In the previous report the occurrence of Japanese Knotweed in a few locations within Galbally was highlighted. It was recommended that a programme of eradication should be put in place to control the spread of knotweed to other locations within Galbally.

Galbally Tidy Towns has been successful in treating small areas containing Japanese Knotweed as there was no Japanese Knotweed in these areas when visited in May 2018. There are other areas around the vicinity of the village which have more substantial growth of Japanese Knotweed, however these areas have been highlighted to Limerick City & County Council as well as the local landowners as it is really beyond the remit of the tidy towns to deal with the knotweed in these areas. The fact that local landowners have been made aware of the presence of Japanese Knotweed on their lands and the future implications it could cause has been greatly welcomed by the landowners, the majority of whom were unaware of the potential problems. Overall Galbally Tidy Towns has been successful in eradicating some small areas of knotweed but more importantly it has raised awareness in the community of the problems posed by knotweed to landowners, farmers and properties and more people are now aware of Japanese Knotweed and are taking responsibility to control and eradicate it by seeking professional help and advice from the appropriate authorities.

3.2 Erection of bird nest boxes

In the last report it was recommended that a number of bird nest boxes be made and located throughout the village. Nest boxes have been made for the following species: Blue Tit, Great Tit, House Sparrow. 10 nest boxes were made for Blue Tit/Great Tit and 1 nest box for House Sparrow. The boxes have been located throughout the village in public areas as well as in private gardens. When visited in May 8 of the nest boxes were actively being used; 6 boxes by Blue Tits and 2 boxes by Great Tits.



Fig. 1. Nest box with Blue Tit at entrance hole.

The erection of bird nest boxes is a simple way of providing nesting habitat for birds, particularly Blue Tits, as they readily take to the boxes. By giving nest boxes to members of the public you are also helping raise awareness of biodiversity This is an example of community interaction, the Tidy Towns provide the nest boxes and the person receiving the box maintains it (clean out annually in autumn) and

informs the Tidy Towns if the box was used and by what species...easy to do as it will either be Blue Tit or Great Tit.

Galbally Tidy towns nest box scheme for the common garden birds such as Blue Tit and Great Tit has been very successful.

3.2.1 Dipper nest pipe

The Dipper is a blackbird sized bird that is found along streams and rivers. Two Dipper nest pipes were made and placed under the bridges over the River Aherlow. One of these nest pipes had been located under the bridge over the stream but was relocated to one of the bridges on the River Aherlow. A pair of Dippers has used one of the nest pipes and there was a nest in it in April of this year (2018). The other nest pipe was actually used by a Grey Wagtail as a nest site, so although not intended, it was great to see the nest pipe being used by the Grey Wagtail, this species is Red listed on Birds of Conservation Concern Ireland (BOCCI) so it is great to see a pair utilizing the nest pipe as a nest site. The Dipper nest pipe scheme has also been very successful.



Fig.2 Dipper nest pipe under bridge on River Aherlow



Fig. 3 Dipper



Fig. 4 Grey Wagtail

3.3 Erection of bat boxes

A number of bat boxes have been erected in suitable locations within the village. Inside the walls of the graveyard there is a bat box located on one of the mature beech trees. These mature beech trees are important for bats as they have lots of holes and crevices for bats to roost in. Leislers bat has been recorded at this location and there is a strong possibility that they are roosting in the trees. Common Pipistrelle bats have also been recorded and they probably use the bat box as a roost site.



Fig. 5 Mature beech trees in graveyard.

The mere fact that bat boxes are present around the village will catch peoples attention and help raise awareness of the fact that there are bats in Galbally. A couple of bat walks are also planned for summer 2018 which will further help raise awareness of bats within Galbally.



Fig. 6 Bat box on beech tree in graveyard.

3.4 Galbally Junior Tidy Towns

Galbally have initiated a Junior Tidy Towns element to the main Tidy Towns group and the junior tidy towns members have been actively involved in a number of nature projects. This is a great way of raising awareness of biodiversity within Galbally not only amongst the children but also their parents. Children today are out of touch with nature and the outdoors so it is great to see children involved in mini nature projects.



Fig. 7 Junior Tidy Towns busy planting acorns and hazelnuts collected from old tree stock in the area.

One such project has been the collection of acorns and hazelnuts from old tree stock within the Galbally area. The junior tidy towns members were busy collecting and planting these seeds in Autumn 2017 and Galbally now has nearly 300 Oak and Hazel seedlings which will be planted in different locations around Galbally when they have become saplings.

This project is a simple way of getting the children actively involved in nature conservation in a hands on approach that they can enjoy. They can see the whole process of how a tree produces seeds, how they grow in the ground to become seedlings and saplings and eventually a tree. This is a great way of raising awareness of the native trees in Galbally and their importance for other creatures.

3.5 Rat poison and Birds of Prey awareness campaign.

During the wildlife survey that was conducted in preparation for the 2014 Biodiversity Action Plan a number of birds of prey were recorded including Barn Owl and Kestrel. The Barn Owl is Red listed on the “Birds of Conservation Concern Ireland” meaning that it is a species of high conservation concern due to a decline in breeding populations. Loss of habitat and intensification of farming are some of the causes for its decline.

Another negative impact on Barn Owls is the widespread indiscriminate use of rat poison. Rats and mice that have eaten poison do not die immediately, they become sluggish and are easier to catch by Barn Owls. This results in secondary poisoning of the Barn Owl. Poisoned bait laid for rats can also be eaten by mice and voles and lead to secondary poisoning of other birds of prey such as Kestrel. Chicks fed on poisoned rats and mice are also dying from exposure to the poisons.

The fact that Barn Owls are present in the Galbally area is very encouraging and welcome. As a way of raising awareness of the effects of rat poisoning on wildlife and in particular Barn Owls and Kestrel, Galbally Tidy Towns has produced a leaflet highlighting the effects of rat poisoning on species like the Barn Owl. The leaflet also highlights alternatives to rat poison such as live trapping or better food storage hygiene.

The leaflets have been given to local farmers and householders as a means of raising awareness. This is the first step in a bigger scheme that Galbally Tidy towns has planned for Barn Owl and Kestrel conservation. In Autumn 2018 it is planned to make and erect a couple of Barn Owl and Kestrel nest boxes in suitable identified locations.

4.0 Project to conserve, enhance and raise awareness of biodiversity

Following consultation with Galbally Tidy Towns the following projects are recommended over the next 3 years to conserve, enhance and raise awareness of biodiversity within Galbally.

4.1 Development of an ecology park.

Galbally Tidy Towns has recently purchased a plot of land near the GAA pitch adjacent to the River Aherlow. The site is approximately 2.5 acres in size and offers a great opportunity for it to become a biodiversity haven. It is planned to create an “Ecology Park” at the site. A section of the site could be planted with native trees collected as seeds from old stock within Galbally. This would act as a seed bank within Galbally of native trees from the area.



Fig. 8 The site for the proposed Ecology Park.

The rest of the site could be managed as a wildflower area, allowing wildflowers to develop naturally and managing the area for wildflowers by having a mowing regime and no use of fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides. This would also make the park a pollinator friendly area beneficial to bees and butterflies.

The “Ecology Park” would also be an ideal location to bring children from the local National School to experience nature and learn about pollinators, wildflowers and native trees.

4.2 Barn Owl nest box scheme

Barn Owl are known to occur in the Galbally area. Barn Owl is a red list species meaning that it is of high conservation concern while Kestrel is amber listed meaning it is of medium conservation concern. Over the summer months suitable nesting locations within the Galbally area will be identified and in the Autumn 2 Barn Owl boxes will be erected at the sites.



Fig. 9 Example of a Barn Owl nest box

As a precursor to this project the tidy towns have distributed an information leaflet on the effects of rat poison to wildlife and birds of prey with particular reference to Barn Owl. This information leaflet will form part of the overall Barn Owl project. By erecting these nest boxes it is hoped that they will become occupied and help combat a lack of available nest sites for Barn Owl. Barn Owls tend to nest in old buildings, over the summer it is planned to survey potential nest sites and engage with the landowners regarding installing a Barn Owl nest box within the building if suitable. The surveying of suitable nest sites will be undertaken by wildlife biologist Tony Kenneally. It is also planned to hold a Bird Of Prey talk in the Autumn to highlight birds of prey that occur in Galbally. This talk will have live Barn Owls and Kestrels from Animal Magic, a wildlife rehabilitation centre based in Kilmallock. This will allow people get close up views of Barn Owl and other birds of Prey which will hopefully help people make more conscious choices as regards using rat poison and also get people on board with the Barn Owl nest box project.

4.3 Biodiversity awareness measures

As a means of raising awareness of biodiversity within Galbally it is recommended that a number of wildlife walks and talks take place over the coming years. The bird of prey talk planned for the Autumn of 2018 is a great way to promote the Barn Owl nest box project.

A bat walk is also highly recommended, there is a newly formed bat group in Limerick and if the tidy towns liaise with them a bat walk could be organized annually.

It is also very important to link in with the local national school, the tidy towns have been doing this and a number of visits by wildlife experts has taken place in the school. The junior tidy towns are also actively involved in nature projects and should continue to do so.

4.3.1 Using social media

Social media is a great way to raise awareness of biodiversity within Galbally and also to interact with people and get them involved. Galbally Tidy Towns has been doing this with the last number of years and it has really helped raise awareness of some of the issues affecting biodiversity. The barn owl project and the affects of rat poison on barn owls could be highlighted using twitter or facebook.