

Galbally

Community Biodiversity Action Plan

2024-2028



A report for Galbally Tidy Towns

2024

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Community Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2028

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1. Executive Summary

Galbally is a village in southeast County Limerick, on the border with County Tipperary. It is located at the foot of the Galtee Mountains and at the western approach to the Glen of Aherlow. The Aherlow River, flowing down from the Galtee mountains, runs by the village, to meet the River Suir a short distance north of Cahir. Galbally is in a valley overlooked by the Galtee Mountains.

The main aim of this project was to provide an updated 5 Year Biodiversity Action Plan for the village and surrounding areas.

This plan follows on from previous biodiversity action plans for Galbally and provides guidance for the next 5 years. Some of the main aims are:

- To propose measures aimed at conserving and enhancing the biodiversity value of Galbally and its surroundings.
- To propose measures aimed at enhancing public appreciation of the natural heritage of the area.
- To propose measures aimed at actively involving the community in nature projects.

Galbally and its environs has a number of areas that support a rich variety of native flora & fauna. Areas that have a high biodiversity value within the village are the River Aherlow and associated streams, Galbally Ecological Park, treelines, hedgerows and buildings within the village.

A total of 16 different habitat types were recorded in the environs of Galbally village. Of the habitats recorded; the river, ecological park, treelines, hedgerows and woodland areas are the most importance from a biodiversity perspective. The survey recorded a total of 133 species of flora and fauna as occurring within the study area. This includes 130 species of higher plants; 55 bird species; 10 mammals; and 285 insect species. Threats to the biodiversity of the

area include inappropriate management of public spaces, intensive farming, non native species, drainage and other land use changes in sensitive areas.

This report outlines a number of recommendations and actions aimed at conserving and enhancing the biodiversity value of key areas within the village as well as recommendations for improving access to and interpretation of the natural heritage of the area for the general public.

2. Introduction

In June 2024 wildlife biologist Tony Kenneally was asked by Galbally Tidy Towns to prepare an updated biodiversity action plan for Galbally. This updated plan is a continuation of previous biodiversity action plans and provides Galbally with a plan for the next 5 years covering the period 2024 to 2028.

Galbally is surrounded by a varied natural landscape that includes rivers, woodlands and uplands. The habitats contained in this natural landscape support a rich variety of native flora & fauna (biodiversity) and is a valuable asset for the people that live in the region, as a recreational as well as economic resource. It is important that the rich biodiversity found in the natural landscape is promoted, conserved and enhanced so that future generations will be able to benefit and appreciate this valuable asset. A key element in this, is highlighting to the local community the rich biodiversity that exists in their locality, unless people are aware of what exists in their area they are less likely to recognize the importance of conserving it. This plan aims to help raise awareness of the existing habitats and the rich variety of life they support as well as recommending actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

2.1 Biodiversity

Biodiversity can be defined as the variety of all life on earth. This includes plants and animals and the habitats and ecosystems that they live in.

Biodiversity provides us with many essential ‘goods and services’ – clean air and water, food, fuel, building materials, fertile soils, nutrient recycling, pollination, pest and disease control, medicines etc. In Ireland, biodiversity contributes at least €2.8 billion to the Irish economy each year making it a valuable national asset. Biodiversity loss is a global issue that is going to affect each and every one of us. The loss of biodiversity is having a critical impact on the ability of ecosystems to provide the services upon which we depend.

In order to prevent the future loss of biodiversity at a national and international level, it is crucial that the value of biodiversity be conveyed to the wider public and actions taken at a local level.

2.2 Biodiversity Action Plans

Biodiversity Action Plans provide the local community with a framework for conserving, managing and enhancing the biodiversity value of habitats within the local community.

The production and implementation of a local biodiversity action plan requires coordinated community action among groups, individuals, landowners, local authorities and other organizations. Raising awareness of local biodiversity and having a local biodiversity action plan will help ensure that community based projects and activities will not have an adverse affect on biodiversity or associated habitats. Ideally, the plan should help conserve and enhance biodiversity through raising awareness, species conservation, habitat creation and management. Successful implementation of the plan contributes to the national and EU objective of halting biodiversity loss.

2.3 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of Galbally Biodiversity Action Plan are:

- To preserve and enhance the habitats within Galbally
- To raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity amongst the people of Galbally
- To actively involve the local community in wildlife and nature projects.
- To develop a number of nature trails with wildlife information signs.

Data from previous habitat and wildlife surveys was used in the compilation of this report when identifying existing habitats and biodiversity within Galbally and its environs. The area the plan covers extends beyond the urban limits of Galbally. This is necessary as it is important to include habitats in the hinterland of the village as the biodiversity of the village is intrinsically linked to the biodiversity in the surrounding landscape.

Based on the results of these surveys and actions already implemented from previous plans, a number of recommendations are made to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the area, as well as measures to raise awareness amongst the local community.

3.0 Biodiversity of Galbally

The biodiversity of Galbally and its environs was recorded and evaluated by direct observation and targeted surveying of specific species and habitats, based on results from previous surveys. Surveying for flora and fauna focused on four main areas as well as the urban habitats of Galbally. The four main areas with the highest biodiversity value included:

- The River Aherlow and associated streams.
- Galbally Ecological Park
- Hedgerows, treelines and woodland areas.

- Galbally village.

A full list of the species recorded is included in the appendix of this report.

3.1 Sites designated for nature conservation

The importance of the habitats around Galbally for wildlife and biodiversity is recognised by the presence of two protected sites deemed to be of international importance for the protection of certain species and habitats deemed to be threatened across western Europe. These sites are known as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). These sites are collectively known as Natura 2000 sites. Natura 2000 is the centerpiece of European Union (EU) nature and biodiversity policy. It is an EU-wide network of nature protection areas for the protection of habitats and species. The River Aherlow from just east of Lisvarrinane forms part of the Lower River Suir Special Area of Conservation (SAC site code 002137), while Galbally is also within 7 km of the Galtee Mountains Special Area of Conservation (SAC site code 000646),

3.2. Habitats of Galbally

Galbally is surrounded by a varied natural landscape including woodlands, semi-natural grasslands, rivers and uplands. Within the urban areas of Galbally there is a variety of `man-made` habitats including parkland, playing fields, buildings and gardens. A total of 15 different habitat types (classified according to Fossitt (2000) '*A Guide to Habitats in Ireland*') were recorded within the area and are presented in **Table 4.1**

Table 4.1 The main habitat types recorded in Galbally and its environs 2023

Habitat Category	Habitat type	Habitat code
<i>Freshwater habitats</i>	Eroding/upland rivers	FW1
	Drainage ditches	FW4
<i>Grassland and marsh</i>	Improved agricultural grassland	GA1
	Amenity grassland	GA2
	Dry meadows and grassy verges	GS2
	Wet grassland	GS4
	Marsh	GM1
<i>Woodland and scrub</i>	Wet willow-alder-ash woodland	WN6
	Mixed broadleaved woodland	WD1
	Conifer Plantation	WD4
	Hedgerows	WL1
	Oak-Birch-Holly woodland	WN1
	Scattered trees and parkland	WD5
	Scrub	WS1
<i>Cultivated and built land</i>	Buildings and artificial surfaces	BL3

Information on these habitats and associated species of flora and fauna has been included in previous Biodiversity Action Plans.

Based on these a number of Biodiversity conservation and awareness measures are recommended in the following section.

4.0 Biodiversity Recommendations

4.1 Recommendation to conserve and enhance Biodiversity

4.1.1 Galbally Ecology Park.

Gallbally Ecology Park is a parcel of land that was purchased with nature conservation in mind. The park is located adjacent to the River Aherlow and is managed for wildlife. The grassland is not fertilized and is only mown in the Autumn when wildflowers have set seed. This has allowed a greater variety of wildflowers to establish in the park than would be found in surrounding farmland. Some wildflowers present include; Red Clover, White Clover,

Ragged-Robin, Foxglove, Ox-eye Daisy and Hawkbits. Adjacent to the river you can expect to find Purple Loose-strife, Watermint and Meadowsweet.



Fig. 1 Galbally Ecology Park



Fig.2 Galbally Ecology Park.

The wildflower meadow will also support a variety of pollinating bees and butterflies as well as numerous other species of insects and invertebrates.

The following biodiversity conservation measures are recommended for the park:

- Collect wildflower seeds from the park and distribute in the local community. These could be collected by the local school children and used to establish a wildflower area in the school grounds or elsewhere in the community. The Park would be acting as a seed bank.
- Use a certain area of the park to establish a native woodland with seeds collected from native trees in the area and transplanted once they are saplings. Again this would be a good project for the local school.
- Continue the existing mowing regime and non use of fertilisers . Also it was noted that there is an area of ferns within the park. It is important to control the spread of these as they can be invasive.

4.1.2 Barn Owl nest box scheme

Due to declines in its population and range the Barn Owl is a Red list species on the Birds of Conservation Concern Ireland (BOCCI) meaning that it is of high conservation concern. Intensification of farming and lack of suitable nest sites such as old stone farm buildings, and the increased use of rodenticides has contributed to its decline. It has long been linked to farming practices in Ireland and is known as the farmers friend as its diet is mainly rodents.

Barn Owls were sighted on a few occasions within the Galbally area and there is plenty of suitable habitat for foraging Barn Owls. Lack of suitable available nest sites is most likely the main factor determining the number of Barn Owls in the area.

Birdwatch Ireland has over 100 occupied Barn Owl nest boxes throughout the country and Barn Owls take well to them once they are suitably located.

It is recommended that a Barn Owl project should be undertaken in the Galbally area. This would involve:

- Surveying existing roost and nest sites to determine numbers of Barn Owls in the area.
- Surveying the area for potential nest box site locations.
- Making and installing a number of Barn Owl nest boxes.
- Monitoring over the coming years.

This project could involve local groups who could make the nest boxes, landowners/farmers who would be interested in having a nest box on their farm. The local community could also be encouraged to report any Barn Owl sightings to the project coordinator.

4.1.3 Swift nest box scheme

Swifts are a summer visitor to Ireland and are also Red listed due to the fact that their population has declined by 40% since 2008. They are similar to swallows but are bigger with much longer wings. They can be heard calling in flight over the town during the summer months

They nest in small cavities in buildings and in the eaves of buildings; however modern buildings provide little in the way of cavities for suitable nest sites. Swifts currently nest on certain buildings in Galbally but there are other buildings that could become suitable nest sites with the addition of Swift nest boxes.

4.1.4 Mowing regime for green areas

More 'mini' meadows

Many public green areas within housing estates are currently managed like a lawn. If these would be cut less often, a more diverse vegetation will develop

which will benefit pollinators and other wildlife. Sections could be allowed grow with the perimeters cut to show that it is managed.

4.2 Recommendations to raise awareness of Biodiversity within Galbally

A number of recommendations are made to help raise awareness of biodiversity amongst the local community. Unless people are aware of the habitats and wildlife that exists in their own area then they are less likely to appreciate it and conserve it. The following are recommended to help raise awareness of biodiversity within Galbally

4.2.1 Wildlife information signs

It is highly recommended that a number of wildlife information signs should be put up around the village. A sign highlighting the Swift nest box scheme would be a very good way of informing people about Swifts and the fact that there are Swifts nesting in Galbally.

Another are that should be considered is the River Aherlow. A sign could be put near the bridges over the rivers highlighting some typical species of the rivers such as Salmon, Otter and Kingfisher.

4.2.2 Raising awareness in the local community

- Raising awareness in the local community about the wildlife in Galbally is also very important for wildlife and habitat conservation. If people are not aware of what wildlife and habitats exist in Galbally then they are

less likely to appreciate them. The following recommendations are made to achieve this:

- Work together with residence committees to enhance biodiversity value of the various estates through wild flower friendly cutting regime of public greens and installation of bird boxes, bat boxes, bee hotels, hedgehog homes etc.
- Work together with men shed to make various wildlife boxes
- Work together with Limerick City and County Council on wildlife friendly roadside management and targeting invasive plant species along roadsides and greenways
- Organise guided nature walks throughout the year in the different habitats, such as the Ecology Park.
- Develop a facebook page specifically for wildlife, where people can report wildlife sightings and post photos. Keep a record of all wildlife sightings and submit to the National Biodiversity Data Centre.