

# EU LIFE Newsletter

No. 2 December 2018



National Rural Network

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South Dublin County Council Chief Executive Danny McLoughlin, Cllr Ossian Smyth Cathaoirleach of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Mayor of SDCC Cllr Mark Ward with Representatives from South Dublin County Council, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment gather at Rathfarnham Castle for Dublin Urban Rivers LIFE launch. Image Credit: South Dublin County Council

## Launch of Dublin Urban Rivers LIFE

On Monday 17 September 2018, the launch took place of a new LIFE project, Dublin Urban Rivers LIFE. LIFE is the European Union's only funding programme dedicated to the environment, nature and climate action.

Dublin Urban Rivers LIFE is a collaboration between South Dublin County Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. Dublin Urban Rivers LIFE is a €2.5 million project, of which more than 50% of the financing is contributed by the European Union. It will run until 2022 and aims to address pollution in urban rivers, primarily caused by domestic misconnections to the surface water drainage system.

The project will focus on two urban rivers: the River Griffeen in South Dublin County and the Carrickmines Stream in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. Construction of Integrated Constructed Wetlands and application of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) will be incorporated into the project.

The launch was held in the grounds of Rathfarnham Castle, with Cllr. Mark Ward, Mayor of South Dublin County Council and Cllr. Ossian Smyth, Cathaoirleach of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, attending and speaking about the value of water quality in front of the appropriately watery backdrop of the duck pond.

You can find out more about LIFE at [www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/life-programme](http://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/life-programme), or by getting in touch: [LIFE@dccae.gov.ie](mailto:LIFE@dccae.gov.ie).



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## Exchanging Knowledge for the Protection of Freshwater Pearl Mussel Habitats

One of the most important aspects of EU co-funded initiatives such as the LIFE programme is knowledge transfer. The aim of liaison between EU LIFE Nature/Biodiversity projects is to learn and share important findings.

On 4 July 2018, IRD Duhallow's RaptorLIFE team visited KerryLIFE to exchange knowledge between two of those projects.

KerryLIFE is a demonstration project in the Caragh and Blackwater river catchments in South Kerry. It is being implemented over a five and a half year period from 2014 to 2019 to restore the two internationally important freshwater pearl mussel populations. The project seeks to develop and demonstrate sustainable land use management techniques and practices for local farmers and forest-owners in freshwater pearl mussel (FPM) catchments.

The IRD Duhallow RaptorLIFE project aims to improve the conservation status of a range of protected species and habitats within two NATURA 2000 sites through active restoration measures. This €3.1 million initiative, co-funded by the EU Commission, involves the implementation of a number of 'on the ground' conservation actions over a four and a half year period for annexed species such as Hen harrier, Merlin, Atlantic salmon and Brook lamprey.



*Low water levels directly impacting the freshwater pearl mussel.  
Image Credit: IRD Duhallow RaptorLIFE*

in the area. Unlike in the Duhallow region where nutrient enrichment and sedimentation from the eroding riverbanks are the main stressors to aquatic organisms, rivers in Kerry have suffered mainly due to changes in hydrological regimes, including altered timing and quantity of land runoff caused mainly by relatively recent drainage. This, coupled with climatic changes seen in Ireland in recent years, has resulted in direct negative impacts on the freshwater pearl mussel populations.

The RaptorLIFE team witnessed sight of these issues on the day and were shocked to see how low water levels due to the recent drought can impact mussels. Some of the bivalves were trying to move slowly into the deeper water but for many of them it was already too late.

Another central aspect of the visit that is very relevant to the RaptorLIFE project was how to manage forestry operations in sensitive areas (such as the Upper Blackwater SAC) to make them safer and minimise negative impacts on the aquatic environment. Although KerryLIFE does not perform any instream or drain engineering works, they have provided us with many ideas and expert advice on trapping the sediment before it even gets to the watercourses. It is possible that those solutions, for example silt fences, can be adapted by our team and will bring benefits to our catchments too.



*IRD Duhallow RaptorLIFE visit to KerryLIFE. From the left Allan Mee, Richard O'Callaghan, Nuala O'Riordan, Padraig Cronin and Jodie Asselin. Image Credit: IRD Duhallow RaptorLIFE*

The main theme that is common for both projects is protection of freshwater habitats and water quality in river catchments of the globally threatened freshwater pearl mussel. Both projects are implementing a suite of actions that are somewhat similar, aiming to improve the quality of freshwater ecosystems on a catchment scale.

The day began with brief introductions at the KerryLIFE office located in Glencar Community Centre, after which all participants headed down to the Caragh river catchment. Richard O'Callaghan (Project Manager) and Padraig Cronin (Farm Advisor) gave a broad overview of the river catchment, existing FPM population and the issues faced by this species resulting from land management pressures



*Juvenile mussels rescued from drying out.  
Image Credit: IRD Duhallow RaptorLIFE*

## AranLIFE Conference: Experiences of Locally-led Approach to Managing HNV Farmland



*Patrick McGurn, Project Manager of AranLIFE discussing the work of the project on one of the conference field trips. The visit looked at grazing management, the farming system and the opening of some of the boreens on the island to facilitate grazing management. Image Credit: AranLIFE*

AranLIFE held a conference on the 11 and 12 of September 2018 on Inis Mór. The conference detailed the AranLIFE approach in implementing a multi-farmer programme, which was locally-led and incorporated a results-based element, in a high nature value farmland area. The project team and participant farmers outlined the works completed and overall findings. The talks detailed how the project came about and how this locally-led, results-based scheme approach could have a role in other High Nature Value farming areas.

Dr Patrick McGurn, Project Manager, told how AranLIFE started with a group of concerned farmers on the islands working with the Heritage Council, both to identify the issues leading to unfavourable conditions of grassland habitats on the islands, which were designated under the European Habitats Directive, and to determine what actions were necessary to improve their condition. They then worked together with all the different stakeholders and using the LIFE programme, the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action, it was possible to source funding to carry out the different actions. The project was 75% funded by the EU and the remainder funded by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG), Teagasc, DAFM, Fáilte Ireland, the Heritage Council and Galway County Council. The project was overseen by DCGH, and managed by the Project Team.

Gráinne Ní Chonghaile, Finance/Administration Officer of the Project, gave details on how the project was implemented through the use of farm plans. Members of the project team worked with participant farmers to draw up a series of actions that were recorded in a farm plan detailing the proposed work and associated costs. The farmers then completed the different actions over the course of the project. Actions included scrub removal and access improvements such as opening of boreens and provision of water facilities for livestock – all to facilitate optimal grazing on the different habitat types. The objective for this work was to improve the ecological condition of the habitat as the Aran Islands contain some of Ireland's best examples of calcareous grassland,

limestone pavement and machair habitats.

To gauge the success of the project required appropriate monitoring and Dr Amanda Browne, Science and Technical Officer, outlined the results of the monitoring programme, which showed an improvement in the habitat types across the three islands. Dr Browne gave details of the results based approach taken by AranLIFE using a simplified 1-5 scoring system, with score 5 representing top quality habitat. For a site to achieve this high score, it must support certain indicator plant species, have encroaching scrub removed and be adequately grazed to ensure maximum diversity. The project also investigated the botanical and agricultural aspects of the grassland types.

Louise Duignan, a Teagasc-Walsh Fellowship student, outlined some of the work she completed for AranLIFE on the yield and feeding value of the different grasslands, the results of which can help the farmer when planning nutrient requirements of grazing livestock. The audience also heard from three of the participant farmers, Domhnall Ó Flaithearta, Pauraic Ó Coincheanainn and Tomás Ó Conghaile who gave details of the work completed on the farm, and on the project, from their perspective.

On the second day, there was a series of farm visits hosted by the farmer where examples of the completed works were visible and discussions were facilitated among the participants on the project and its outputs. Three different farm visits were offered to highlight the different aspects of the island. The conference concluded with a session on future policy and how the findings of AranLIFE could be incorporated into future policy in similar High Nature Value areas, both in an Irish and European context. The conference was an excellent opportunity to present the findings of AranLIFE to a wider audience as it included a range of interested individuals and groups including farmers from the islands and other High Nature Value farming areas, Government bodies including representatives from Northern Ireland, academic institutions, NGOs and media representatives.

## RaptorLIFE – Connecting and Restoring Habitats for Hen Harrier, Merlin, Atlantic Salmon and Brook Lamprey in Duhallow



**NRN Project Manager James Claffey (right) on a study visit to IRD Duhallow's Raptor LIFE Project with team members Dr Allan Mee (centre) and Tomasz Siekaniec during the summer. Image Credit: NRN**

IRD Duhallow's RaptorLIFE is a 4.5-year project (2015-2019), whose overarching objective is to bring local communities together to better manage upland and freshwater habitats within the Duhallow area. RaptorLIFE is an ambitious project in terms of scale (large project area joining two Natura 2000 sites) and political sensitivities. For this reason, the project has concentrated on building effective partnerships with the local community and statutory authorities.

RaptorLIFE is implementing a range of actions to improve awareness and restore habitat for Hen harrier, Merlin and other upland species in the Stacks to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA. The bulk of the actions are trialled on six demonstration farms that collectively cover an area of 300 hectares. The conservation actions include heather regeneration through controlled burning and mowing, rush control, improvement of existing hedgerows, removal of wildling conifers, and the control of invasive plant species. Small mammal trapping and farm bird surveys undertaken throughout the project will provide quantifiable data on the densities of potential prey items pre and post-treatment. Outside the demonstration farms, RaptorLIFE are working with Coillte and the Forest Service to create a riparian foraging corridor, free of conifers, which will connect the SPA with the Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC at the source of the Blackwater. RaptorLIFE have been working with the county councils to treat invasive plants on the road network, with over 100km of roadside treated for knotweed thus far.

RaptorLIFE is also implementing a range of actions to improve awareness and restore habitat for Atlantic salmon, Brook lamprey and other freshwater species in the Blackwater River SAC. RaptorLIFE have been working in partnership with local farmers to improve the health of the Owentaraglin and Upper Blackwater rivers through bankside fencing.

Duhallow offers farmers with land adjoining these rivers free bankside fencing and alternative livestock drinking sources. Since June 2016, RaptorLIFE has erected 23.5km of new fencing and 82 cattle drinkers, with more lined up at no cost to landowners. As an added incentive, landowners in the GLAS agri-environmental scheme receive payment for the fencing work done by IRD Duhallow.

In addition to the fencing, RaptorLIFE are helping to protect riverbanks through the planting of native trees on eroding bends, and treating invasive weed species that are creating erosion and biodiversity problems on the banks. To date RaptorLIFE has used herbicide to treat knotweed on 25km of riverbank and Himalayan balsam has been manually removed from over 80km of riverbank. All of these actions are helping to keep silt and nutrients out of the river, creating better habitat for our freshwater fish and the freshwater pearl mussel.

For further information, visit the website: <http://duhallowlife.com/raptor-life>.



**Monitoring of the Hen harrier population in the Duhallow area. Image Credit: IRD Duhallow RaptorLIFE**

## Pennine PeatLIFE: Restoring Badly-eroded Blanket Bogs in Northern England



*Peatland restoration work by Pennine PeatLIFE  
Image Credit: Pennine PeatLIFE*

Working to deliver 1,353 hectares of peatland restoration across 16 sites in the North Pennines, Yorkshire Dales and Forest of Bowland, the Pennine PeatLIFE project contributes strongly to conserving this priority habitat under the EU habitats directive.

Pennine PeatLIFE is a four-year peatland restoration project led by the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership in collaboration with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Forest of Bowland AONB. The project started in July 2017 and will run until December 2021. It is funded by the EU LIFE programme with match funding from Yorkshire Water, United Utilities, Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency.

A key notion underpinning the project is that not all peat is the same and consequently not all techniques work in the same way. The project will demonstrate and evaluate geographically appropriate blanket bog restoration techniques suited to the harsher climatic environment of northern England. Cost effectiveness is also a focus, including evaluating Sphagnum-based restoration methods. Novel surveying techniques using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are also being tested to evaluate their application alongside more traditional fieldwork practices.

Using the UK Peatland Code, the project will also develop and trial an innovative Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) method to inform future peatland restoration funding streams. The UK Peatland Code is a voluntary standard for UK peatland projects looking to market the ecosystem benefits of restoration. Other aspects of the project also link to the PES method's development. Trails of cost effective methods feed into the PES to ensure cost is not a barrier to adoption of conservation measures. UAVs could be an effective survey and validation tool. Pennine PeatLIFE aims to establish management plans for 10 sites under the UK

Peatland Code as well as produce prototype Peatland Code agreement templates.

Another core objective of Pennine PeatLIFE is to widely share learning and experience on the methods it is applying. In October 2018, Pennine PeatLIFE visited Finland on the second leg of a peatland expertise exchange. Webinars are also hosted and in 2018 covered topics such as the UK Peatland Code and geospatial analysis of blanket bogs using UAV technology. Pennine PeatLIFE is also available and keen to assist projects in development and recently worked with a project in Northern Ireland.

To stay updated, sign up for the Pennine PeatLIFE newsletter: <http://penninepeatlife.org.uk/subscribe/>

Website: <http://penninepeatlife.org.uk/>



*Surveying of Tynehead using an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle  
Image Credit: Pennine PeatLIFE*

## European Commission Announces Quarter of a Billion Euro Investment in LIFE Projects



*Image Credit: Pixabay.com*

In October 2018, the European Commission approved an investment package of €243 million from the EU budget for projects under the LIFE programme supporting nature, the environment and quality of life in Europe's transition to a more sustainable and low-carbon future.

The investment package includes 55 LIFE environment and resource efficiency projects, 40 LIFE nature and biodiversity projects, 15 LIFE environmental governance and information projects, 11 LIFE climate change mitigation projects, 17 LIFE climate change adaptation projects and 4 LIFE climate governance and information projects. Two Irish projects worth €4 million were included in the announcement - LIFE EcoSens Aquamonitrix (making it easier to monitor water quality) and Dublin Urban Rivers LIFE (minimising misconnections in the urban water network).

Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, Miguel Arias Cañete said: "These innovative projects show the added value of European cooperation. In developing and sharing the best ways to reduce emissions and increase resilience to climate change, they support implementation of the 2030 climate and energy framework across the EU."

Funds of €196.2 million will go to projects in the field of environment and resource efficiency, nature and biodiversity, and environmental governance and information.

This includes major investments in projects that will enable more plastic to be reused. Turning this waste into high-quality raw materials for the car, construction and packaging industries is just one way in which LIFE gives practical support to achieving the goals of the European Commission's European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy.

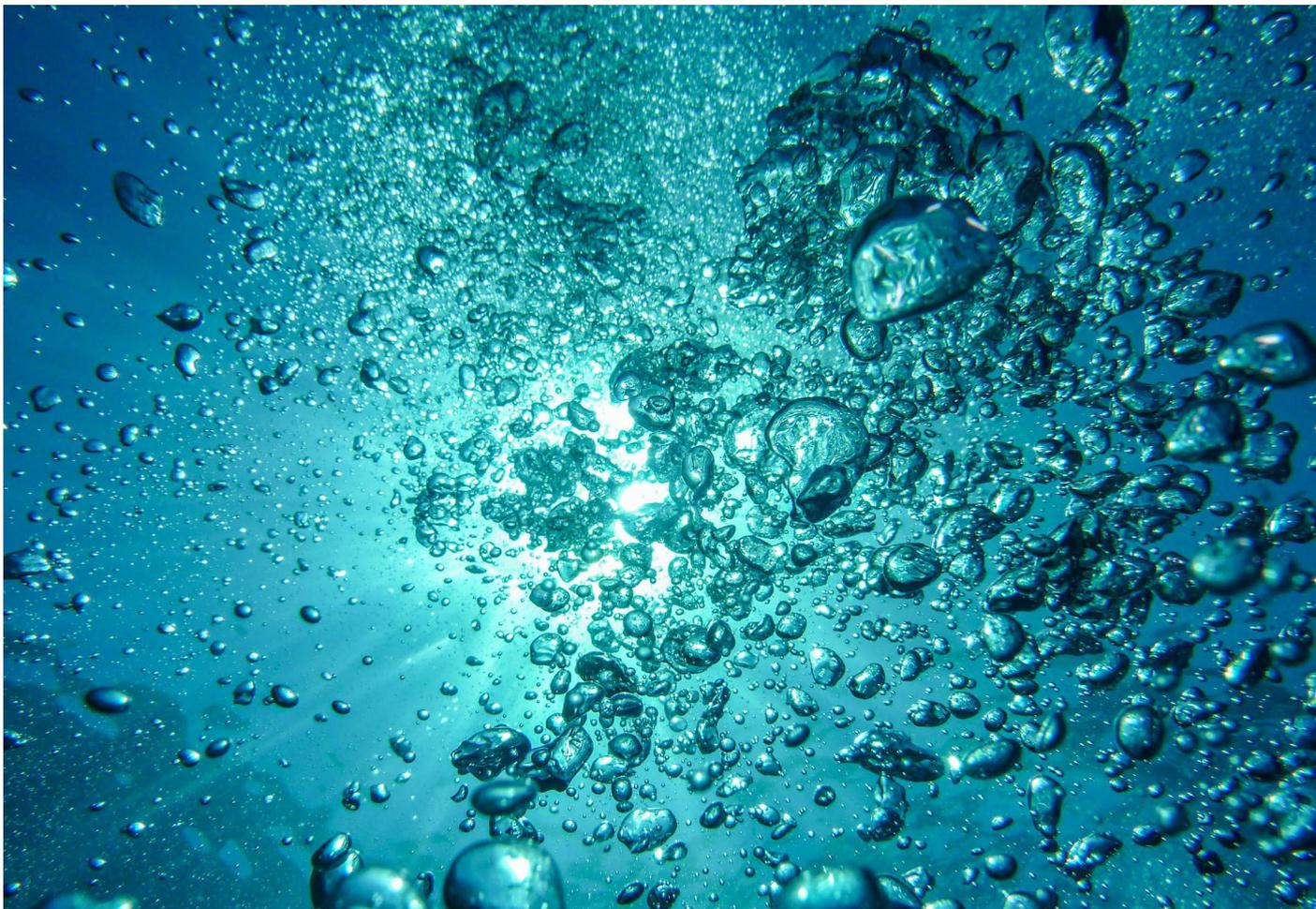
LIFE remains at the forefront of efforts to increase awareness of the valuable ecosystem services that nature provides and to conserve endangered habitats and species. From reducing conflicts between people and wildlife in Greece, Italy, Romania and Spain, to promoting sustainable agricultural practices in Italy, Malta and Spain, the many LIFE nature projects will help to implement the EU Action Plan for Nature.

In the area of climate action, the EU will invest €46.8 million to support climate change mitigation, adaptation and governance and information projects. This includes practical support for Member States drafting their 2030 national climate and energy plans that will help them collectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. LIFE funding will also help farming and forestry adapt to climate change and improve communities' resilience to extreme weather events, from floods and heatwaves to water shortages.

Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu Vella said: "The LIFE programme continues to invest in projects that improve our quality of life, our environment and nature. It helps many talented Europeans to find solutions to some of today's greatest environmental concerns – air pollution, water scarcity, plastic waste, biodiversity and resource loss. And it continues to deliver value for money."

Project descriptions and more details can be found here: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-18-6163\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-18-6163_en.htm)

## EcoSens Aquamonitrix LIFE project kicks off in Ireland



Source: Pixabay.com

Over its more than two and a half year life-span, the EcoSens Aquamonitrix LIFE project aims to bring a cost-effective, portable, water quality monitoring solution to market that meets requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive.

The EcoSens Aquamonitrix LIFE project is coordinated by T.E Laboratories Ltd (TelLab), an environmental monitoring SME established in 1991 and headquartered in Carlow. TelLab specialises in water analysis and water sensor technology. The project also has partners in Finland, Spain and Portugal. Project partners came together in October 2018 at TelLab in Tullow for a project commencement meeting.

The newly developed water quality monitoring device that will emerge from the EcoSens Aquamonitrix LIFE project will carry out near continuous analysis of water sources, monitoring key indicators of water quality including nutrients, pH, chemical oxygen demand and suspended solids.

Work has just started on the production of the prototypes for the on-site tests. Prototypes will be tested in 11 environments, assessing the device's environmental and

economic performance. This affordable technology will support the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive and related EU policy, including directives on nitrates, drinking water, bathing water, groundwater, urban wastewater treatment, floods, marine strategy, habitats and industrial emissions.

Find out more about the project at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybeolngk>

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## Join the NRN for Free

If you are Interested in issues related to EU LIFE, please sign up to the National Rural Network (NRN) on our website on [www.nationalruralnetwork.ie](http://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie).

The NRN is a membership network for farmers, agricultural advisors, rural communities and others interested in rural development. It provides up-to-date information, case studies, seminars and conferences to maximise the beneficial outcomes of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 for rural stakeholders.

Our ambition is to bring the RDP into the lives of as many people as possible by communicating its key opportunities and outputs to all relevant stakeholders.

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**National Rural Network**