



# **County Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030 Discussion Paper**



**The Heritage Council**







# Introduction

In 2019, Wicklow County Council became the first local authority in Ireland to declare "a biodiversity and climate-change emergency", in recognition of the need to respond more urgently to the threat of climate breakdown and the global decline of species.

The County Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan, 2025-2030 will provide a framework for biodiversity action for the next five years with the aim of halting biodiversity loss in county Wicklow. It is underpinned by the objectives of Ireland's fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan.



Wicklow County Council wish to acknowledge the role of the Heritage Council, in funding the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme and supporting the preparation and implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan in partnership with the Council.

**Your Voice counts... We want to hear from you!**

Your contributions during this pre-draft consultation stage will help to guide the objectives and actions of the County Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030.





## Some thoughts and Ideas

What do think are important features of County Wicklow's biodiversity?

How do you interact with Nature in Wicklow?

Have you noticed a decline in biodiversity in your local area?

What do you think are the greatest threats to biodiversity in County Wicklow?

Can you think of actions that your local community can do to help biodiversity?

Can you think of actions that Wicklow County Council can do to help biodiversity?

How do you imagine Wicklow's biodiversity will look in 2030?

**We invite you make online submissions on our consultation hub:**

<https://www.wicklow.ie/Living/Services/Online-Consultation-Hub/County-Wicklow-Biodiversity-Action-Plan-2025-2030-Pre-Draft-Public-Consultation>

**By Post:**

**In Writing: To the Senior Executive Officer by email at [climatepolicy@wicklowcoco.ie](mailto:climatepolicy@wicklowcoco.ie) or by post to the Senior Executive Officer at Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Station Road, Wicklow Town, A67 FW96 by the 04th November 2024**

**You can learn more about making a submission to the plan as follows.**

**In person at:**

### **Ballywaltrim Library**

Wednesday 9h October 5-7pm

### **Arklow Library**

Tuesday 15th October 5-7pm

### **Wicklow Library**

Thursday 17th October 5-7pm

### **Blessington Library**

Tuesday 22nd October 5-7pm

### **Greystones Library**

Thursday 24th October 5-7pm

**ONLINE EVENT** (details will be circulated through social media)

Tuesday 22nd October 1 -2pm

# Biodiversity: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?

Biodiversity, short for "biological diversity," refers to the variety of life in a specific area, whether it's the entire planet or a small patch of land. It includes the wide range of animals, plants, birds, insects, fungi, and microorganisms like bacteria that together make up our natural world. Each species and organism in this web of life works together in ecosystems, maintaining balance and supporting life.

Wicklow is rich in biodiversity, with a variety of habitats stretching from the peaks of the Wicklow Mountains down to the coastline and its marine environments. This includes peatlands, native woodlands, natural watercourses, wetlands, semi-natural grasslands, and a diverse farmed landscape across the county.

## Why Does Biodiversity Matter?

Biodiversity is essential for our survival. It provides the natural resources we need, like food, clean water, medicine, and shelter. These resources are known as ecosystem services -nature's way of supporting our well-being. For instance:

### Food Security

Healthy ecosystems with thriving populations of pollinators like bees ensure we can grow crops such as apples, beans, and other fruits and vegetables.

### Clean Water and Flood Prevention

Wetlands and forests naturally filter our water, reduce the severity of flooding, and help manage water flow during droughts.

### Climate Resilience

Ecosystems like woodlands and peatlands capture carbon and help mitigate the impacts of climate change

### Health Benefits

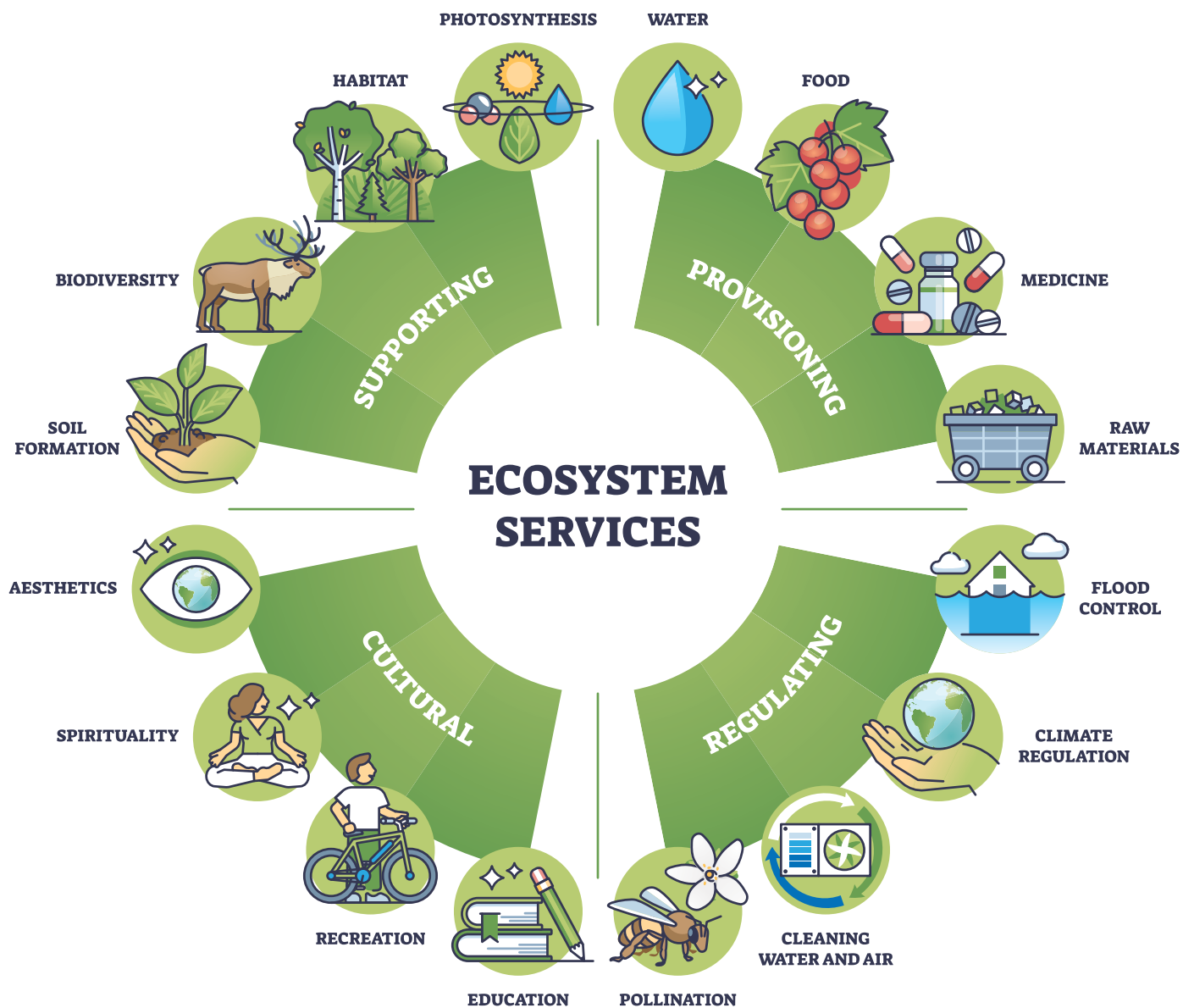
Spending time in nature is proven to lower the risk of chronic diseases and improve mental health.

### Medicine

Many modern and traditional medicines are derived from plants, animals, and other organisms found in nature.

Aside from these tangible benefits, it's important to remember that nature has intrinsic value. Every species has a right to exist, and it's our moral responsibility to protect and restore biodiversity for its own sake, as well as for the future of our planet.

# Why Do We Need Ecosystems?





# Biodiversity Under Pressure

“ *Biodiversity is central to human well-being, but we are destroying it and, therefore, undermining our own future.* ”

Sir Robert Watson,

Former Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services speaking to the Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, 2022

Although Ireland was only the second country in the world to declare a ‘biodiversity emergency’ in 2019, global assessment of the world’s biodiversity shows unprecedented and alarming declines.

- Greater than 50% of native Irish plant species have declined in range and/or abundance when compared with historic records extending as far back as the 1950s.
- Nearly 33% of our semi-natural grasslands have been lost in the last decade.
- Over 50% of Ireland’s 100 bee species have seen substantial declines in numbers since 1980, with 30% of species threatened with extinction.
- 85% of our EU-protected habitats are in unfavourable conditions, while 30% of our 60 EU protected species are in unfavourable status.
- 26% of birds are on the Red List and considered to be of conservation concern





# Causes of Biodiversity loss



Alien and  
Problematic  
Species

Emerging  
Diseases

Unsustainable  
Recreation

Inappropriate  
Development

Water  
Pollution

Air  
Pollution

Incompatible  
farming  
practices



# Biodiversity of County Wicklow

County Wicklow is rich and diverse in habitats that range from the highest peak in Leinster, Lugnaquilla, at 925 metres, to a 60km coastline running the length of the eastern flank of the county, with a wide range of habitats in between:

Alluvial or Wet Woodland

Blanket Bog

Coastal Lagoons

Farmland

Fens

Hedgerows

Lakes

Open Sea

Reedbeds

Rivers

Sand Dunes

Sea Shore

Sea Cliffs

Uplands

Wetlands

Woodland





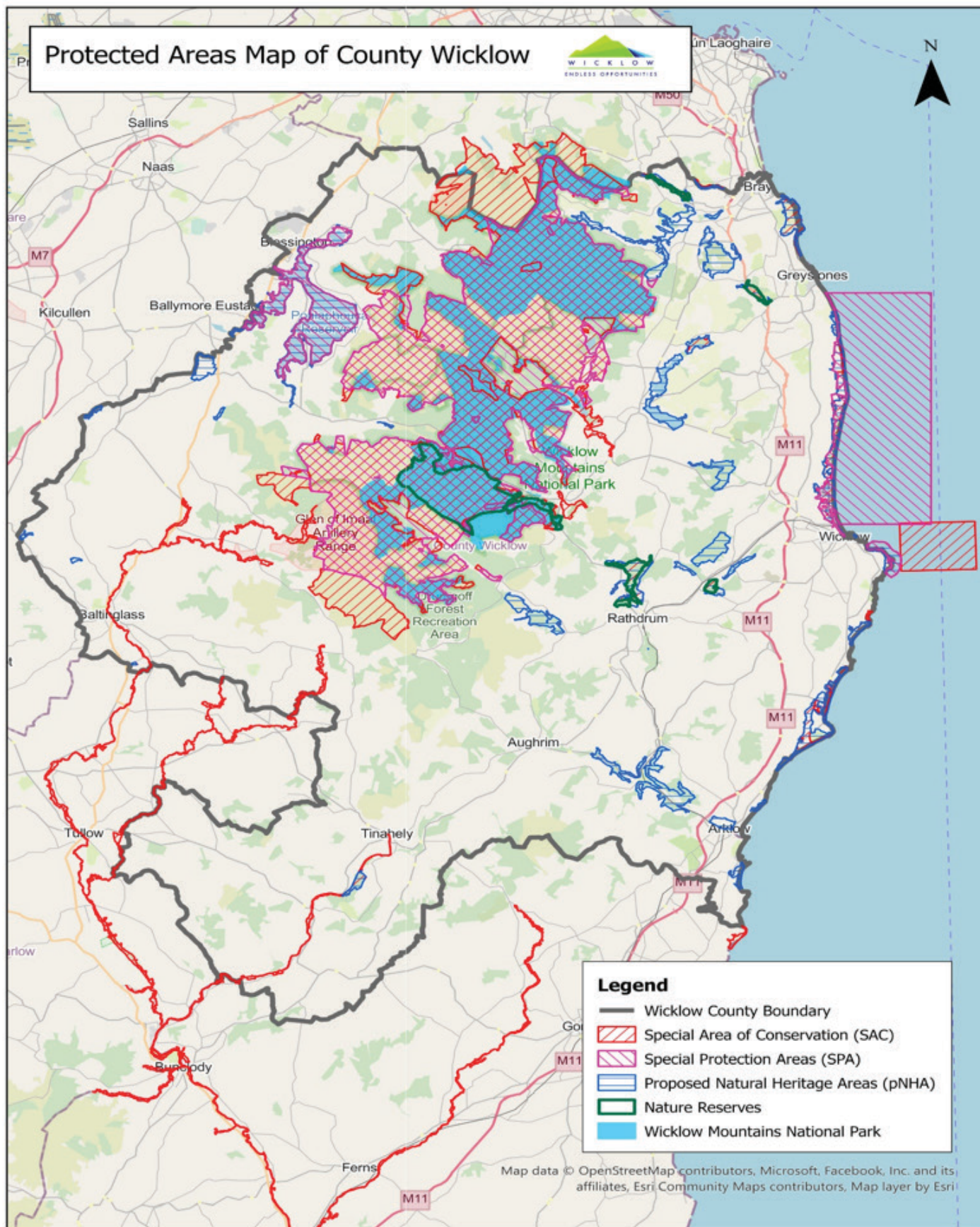
# Where We Protect and Manage Biodiveristy

Species and habitats of international, national and regional importance are protected through designation of specific areas. Wicklow has a good number of designated conservation sites including fourteen Special Areas of Conservation (SAC),

Four Special Protection Areas (SPA), and thirty seven proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs). There is also one National Park extending to 23,000 hectares and six Statutory Nature Reserves.



Site name	pNHA	SAC	SPA
Ballyman Glen	*	*	
Bray Head	*	*	
Buckroney-Brittis Dunes & Fen	*	*	
Carriggower Bog	*	*	
Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve	*		
Glen of the Downs	*	*	
Carriggower Bog	*	*	
Holdenstown Bog	*	*	
Knocksink Wood	*	*	
Magherabeg Dunes	*	*	
The Murrough Wetlands	*	*	*
Slaney River Valley	*		
Vale of Clara, Rathdrum Woods	*	*	
Wicklow Mountains	*	*	*
Wicklow Reef	*		
Poulaphouca Reservoir	*	*	*
Wicklow Head	*	*	*
Wicklow Town Sites	*		
Great Sugar Loaf	*		
Hollywood Glen	*		
Dunlavin Marshes	*		
Powerscourt Woodland	*		
Lowtown Fen	*		
Newtown Marshes	*		
Glenealy Woods	*		
Glenree Valley	*		
Dargle River Valley	*		
Powerscourt Waterfall	*		
Vartry Reservoir	*		
Arklow Town Marsh	*		
Ballycore Rath •	*		
Ballinagee Wood	*		
Ballinacor Wood	*		
Avoca River Valley	*		
Arklow Sand Dunes	*		
Arklow Rock - Askintinney	*		
Kilmacanoge Marsh	*		
Devil's Glen	*		
Avondale	*		
Tomnafinnoge Wood	*		





## Action at Local Level

The new Biodiversity Action Plan for County Wicklow builds on the foundations laid by the previous plan covering the period 2015-2020. It also relates to the upcoming County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2025 – 2030 and it is interconnected to the County Wicklow Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029.

Since this time, multiple initiatives have been undertaken by Wicklow County Council alongside key stakeholders, with the primary goals of raising awareness about biodiversity, understanding the value of biodiversity, and addressing the challenges to maintaining biodiversity. Efforts have also focused on conserving and enhancing County Wicklow's diverse habitats and species, while encouraging active community participation to support biodiversity.

Interest in biodiversity has steadily grown within local communities, with tidy towns and community biodiversity groups leading the charge. Environmental organisations have been expanding, and more residents are getting involved in biodiversity projects and citizen science initiatives.

Recent developments, including increased funding for biodiversity projects and the appointment of a Biodiversity Officer, have been warmly welcomed. These advancements will enable a more ambitious approach to biodiversity conservation in County Wicklow. In the short term, the Biodiversity Officer will play a key role in supporting the preparation of this new Biodiversity Action Plan, while also providing essential advice and support both within Wicklow County Council and to the wider community on biodiversity-related matters.





## Projects funded under Local Biodiversity Action Fund (LBAF)

### Biodiversity Restoration and Management at Bray Head & Wicklow Head

Management plans have been developed for these two critical important coastal sites, and implementation will be rolled out under this Biodiversity Action Plan.





## Biodiversity Restoration and Management at Council owned sites

Increased funding support through the LBAF has facilitated improved management for biodiversity, and Clermont Campus is being developed as a key demonstration site.



### Wicklow Barn Owl Project

This project is now in its third year and goes from strength to strength. The project involves cooperation between landowners, farmers and the project team. Apart from Barn Owl friendly conservation advice, the Wicklow Barn Owl Group promotes a nest box project which has created new roosts and nest sites for Barn Owls in and around County Wicklow farms.

The Wicklow Barn Owl Project is a collaboration between The Heritage Office of Wicklow County Council, National Parks and Wildlife Service and BirdWatch Ireland.





## Biodiversity Restoration and Management at Brittas Bay

Since 2018 an ambitious habitat restoration and public engagement programme has been underway at one of County Wicklow's most important natural heritage sites, Brittas Bay,



## Collaborations with University College Dublin and Bat Conservation Ireland on bat and mayfly projects

In 2024 Wicklow County Council joined several other local authorities nationwide in supported ecological research projects focused on improving our knowledge of key bat and invertebrate species.





# Wicklow County Council Biodiversity Working Group

A Biodiversity Working Group has been assembled to collaborate on the development of the County Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan. Operating as a non-statutory advisory group, it will provide observations on the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the Plan. Effort has been made to pull together a broad representative group, with membership drawn from the following sectors:

- Landowners and farming representatives
  - Community and voluntary groups
- Local heritage and biodiversity organisations or groups
  - Local government officials
  - Local elected representatives
  - Local development and business
- State agencies of relevance to biodiversity conservation

# What is a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan?

Following the launch of the fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan, all local authorities are required to have Biodiversity Action Plans in place by the end of 2026. The Plan will provide a structured approach to biodiversity conservation at the county level, with the following aims:

## **Assess, Protect and Restore Local Biodiversity**

Identify needs and opportunities for biodiversity enhancement in County Wicklow, focusing on local priorities and ensuring alignment with national and international commitments.

## **Embed Biodiversity in Decision-Making**

Integrate biodiversity considerations into local decision-making processes and policies to ensure long-term sustainability

## **Build and Strengthen Partnerships**

Foster collaboration with government bodies, communities, environmental and social organisations, and other stakeholders to raise awareness and implement actions for biodiversity.

## **Ensure Resilience for the Future**

Create and maintain the conditions necessary for long-term resilience, focusing on connectivity, habitat diversity, and the proactive management of threats.

## **Monitor, Learn and Adapt**

Establish systems to monitor progress, assess impacts, and apply adaptive management, ensuring that lessons learned from ongoing actions are used to improve biodiversity outcomes.



Objective 1:  
Adopt a Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society Approach to Biodiversity



Objective 2:  
Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs



Objective 3:  
Secure Nature's Contribution to People



Objective 4:  
Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity



Objective 5:  
Strengthen Ireland's Contribution to International Biodiversity Initiatives



# The 8 Step Process



## Biodiversity and Climate Change

Climate Change refers to the long-term shift in temperatures and weather patterns occurring across the world. Climate Change is disrupting the natural patterns and processes of habitats and species in County Wicklow especially when considering extreme weather events.

Frequent changes in weather patterns such as warm winters, early/late springs, heavy summer rainfall, can disrupt the timing of natural cycles (an early spring may encourage songbirds to nest earlier, when the food source for their young is scarce). Climate change can also enable the spread of invasive species which may not have previously thrived in Ireland's cooler climate.

Many of our habitats not only provide a home for plant and animal species but also act as carbon sinks which can mitigate climate change and the impacts therein. This has added significance when factoring in land use changes which decreases the resilience of our natural heritage assets to withstand the impacts of climate change. Biodiversity helps human well-being through providing nature-based solutions in order to adapt to an increasing amount of extreme weather events due to climate change.



Objective 4 of Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan aims to embed biodiversity at the heart of climate action with the aim of addressing climate change through restoring biodiversity. The link between biodiversity and climate change is enshrined in Irish law through the National Climate Objective that commits to achieve the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy by 2050. The development and implementation of a robust Biodiversity Action Plan for County Wicklow is an important step in addressing challenges linked to climate change and conserving Ireland's biodiversity for future generations



## Biodiversity and Climate Change

Biodiversity is one of our biggest allies in reducing climate change. Healthy ecosystems need to be conserved to increase resilience to climate impacts. As we transition to a biodiversity rich and climate neutral economy by 2050, the Biodiversity Action Plan must tackle climate breakdown at a local level.



Create green areas for trees, plants and pollinators



Bring nature to urban areas



Protect and restore wetlands and traditional grasslands





**This is your plan  
Your opinion matters.**

**Play your part for Biodiversity.**

**Make the Difference!**