

County Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020

The Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2020 identifies the unique natural heritage that exists in the county and sets out an ambitious framework to protect and enhance the wide range of habitats, plants and animals in Westmeath. The plan recognises the importance of and places an emphasis on encouraging community involvement and raising awareness of the value of Westmeath's natural heritage and the importance of biodiversity at a local, national and European level. The protection of our natural heritage resources is the responsibility of us all and this Plan provides everybody with an opportunity to get involved in its protection.

Through the implementation of this plan, we hope to increase our knowledge and understanding of the biodiversity of the county, to identify our most vulnerable habitats and species and the threats facing them and promote best practice to avoid or minimise these threats. The Biodiversity Action Plan provides an opportunity for Westmeath County Council to examine its own work practices as well as promoting the protection of the natural resources within its care. It will also help us to integrate planning for the protection of biodiversity into the Council's day-to-day operations.

The Plan examines concepts and issues in biodiversity and sets out a list of actions which aim to conserve and enhance the Biodiversity of County Westmeath by prioritising, coordinating and initiating actions to ensure effective conservation and enhancement in our county and raising awareness of biodiversity in partnership with local communities.

- The introduction defines Biodiversity in the context of the plan and outlines the legal context of Biodiversity protection.
- Westmeath Biodiversity is summarised in chapter 2, identifying important Habitats, Flora and Fauna within Co. Westmeath.
- Chapter 3 looks at current work on biodiversity in Co. Westmeath and outlines significant threats to Biodiversity.
- Strategic issues discussed in Chapter 4 include peatland management, invasive species and public awareness of Westmeath's Natural Heritage and the concepts of ecological networks and green infrastructure.
- 'What You Can Do' in chapter 5 suggests practical measures you can take to protect biodiversity at home, in the garden, on the farm, at school or at work.
- Finally 'Actions for Biodiversity' lists 102 non-statutory actions for implementation, in the long, medium and short term, over the 2014-2020 duration of the plan.

The actions of the Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan fall into three main categories. Since biodiversity itself is a complex issue, it is impossible to draw borders between those sections and the actions apply often to more than one category.

1. Protection and Development of the Ecological Network
2. Monitoring and Research
3. Raising Awareness

Examples of actions:

- Develop walking trails throughout the county to encourage walking and appreciation of the countryside.
- Organise biodiversity training / information events for community groups, REPS/AEOS participants, landowners & development agencies.
- Prepare Town Biodiversity Plans for Mullingar and Athlone.

The Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan reinforces the Council's commitment to the protection of biodiversity in the county through a range of specific actions to be implemented over the next six years in collaboration with local communities and environmental groups. The Plan is available on the Council's website at <http://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/ourservices/planning/biodiversity/>