

The Owenglin Horseshoe

Gareth McCormack was exhilarated, not to say tired, after a challenging circuit which takes in some of the finest peaks in the Bens. Photos by Gareth McCormack

The Twelve Bens are justifiably one of the most popular of Ireland's mountain ranges. Adventurous walkers can find challenging scrambling and walking on the rock ridges, and in clear weather the extraordinary views combine all of the fabulous diversity inherent in the Connemara landscape: intricate coastline, lake-strewn bog and a hinterland dominated by mountain ranges of great character.

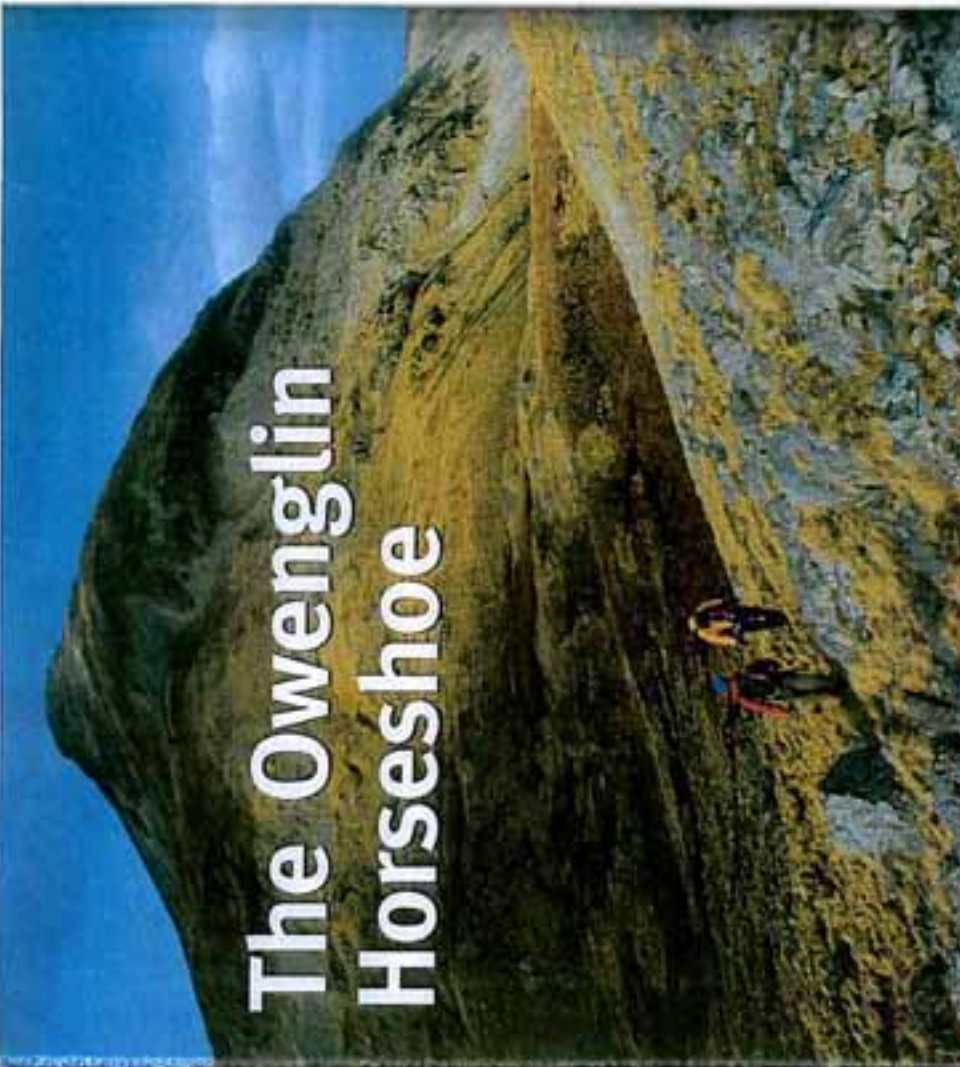
The Ben descenters are a compact

size-shaped knot of summits enclosing not satellite peaks and deep valleys from their central core. The topography is perfectly suited to classic horseshoe walks, and perhaps the most famous of these is the circuit around Connemara Inceadainn (see *WW1* 41). However that circuit's more westerly siting, the Owenglin horseshoe, is every bit as good. Not only does it have the advantage of taking in the Bens' highest summits, Brooban, but it also has more variety in its inverse of the 'grassy Bens': Beacfinn, Muckanaght and Broadaght, which are

Bengower and Benlowes. This route is also quite consisting because the extremely boggy nature of the valley floor makes a return via this route probably more difficult than continuing along the tops. Factors in over fifteen hundred metres of ascent and descent, and you have a day's walk to test the hardest walker.

GETTING TO THE START

The route is accessed from a minor road off the main N89 Galway-Cillfinn road. Two



Descending White's car ridge, the ridge's two peaks form Connemara.

young hooded look out for a minor road on the right (north) side of the road. Follow this for a little more than two kilometres as it climbs over a boggy saddle and then drops down into the Owenglin valley. Park at a large gravel area on the right (GR: L 747,311).

THE WALK

From the parking area, walk back along the road to the edge of a recently felled forestry plantation. In an area that has suffered environmental damage at the hands of Cillfinn, this particular patch is now part of an EU-funded blanket bog restoration scheme.

Turn left off the road and follow a boundary fence east across some flat, wet ground. After a few hundred metres you reach the base of Beaghtach and the slope becomes much steeper. Numerous screepools give a taste of what lies ahead, though the rock is easily avoided by using the plentiful grassy gullies and ramps. A cluster of cairns indicates your close proximity to the top, and up ahead you'll see more cairns on the rocky summit at 518m. There are excellent views to the south across the countless lakes and bog pools inland from Broadaght and Carris. To the north lies the next major summit, Bengower, with the steep descent along its north ridge visible on the skyline. Descend slightly past some small pools

in a broad col and then climb to an interesting top marked by a small cairn. West-northwest and follow an informal rocky path up the narrow shoulder of Bengower (664m). The rocky summit doesn't have the best views but you do have the feeling that you're starting to get into the heart of the range.

The descent from Bengower is the trickiest part of the route and involves some easy scrambling. Descend northeast from the summit for about 50m and then bear left. The descent begins steeply and is marked by a small cairn. A series of ledges and small gullies allows passage down through bands of broken cliffs, bringing you to the col between Benlowes.

A faint path now winds up through the drifts of scree, becoming better defined as you gain height. Good views begin to open up behind you into Connemara, Wicka through a couple of quartzite outcrops shortly before reaching the top of Benlowes (691m). Here you feel like you're in the heart of the range, and this is certainly one of the most interesting summits on the route, with a rugged and exciting kilometre-long summit ridge reminiscent of the Mauntnabla. Intrinsic rock ribs, hollows and outcrops, coupled with the steep steps dropping away to the west, serve to accentuate the sense of adventure on this route. In clear weather finding your way off the



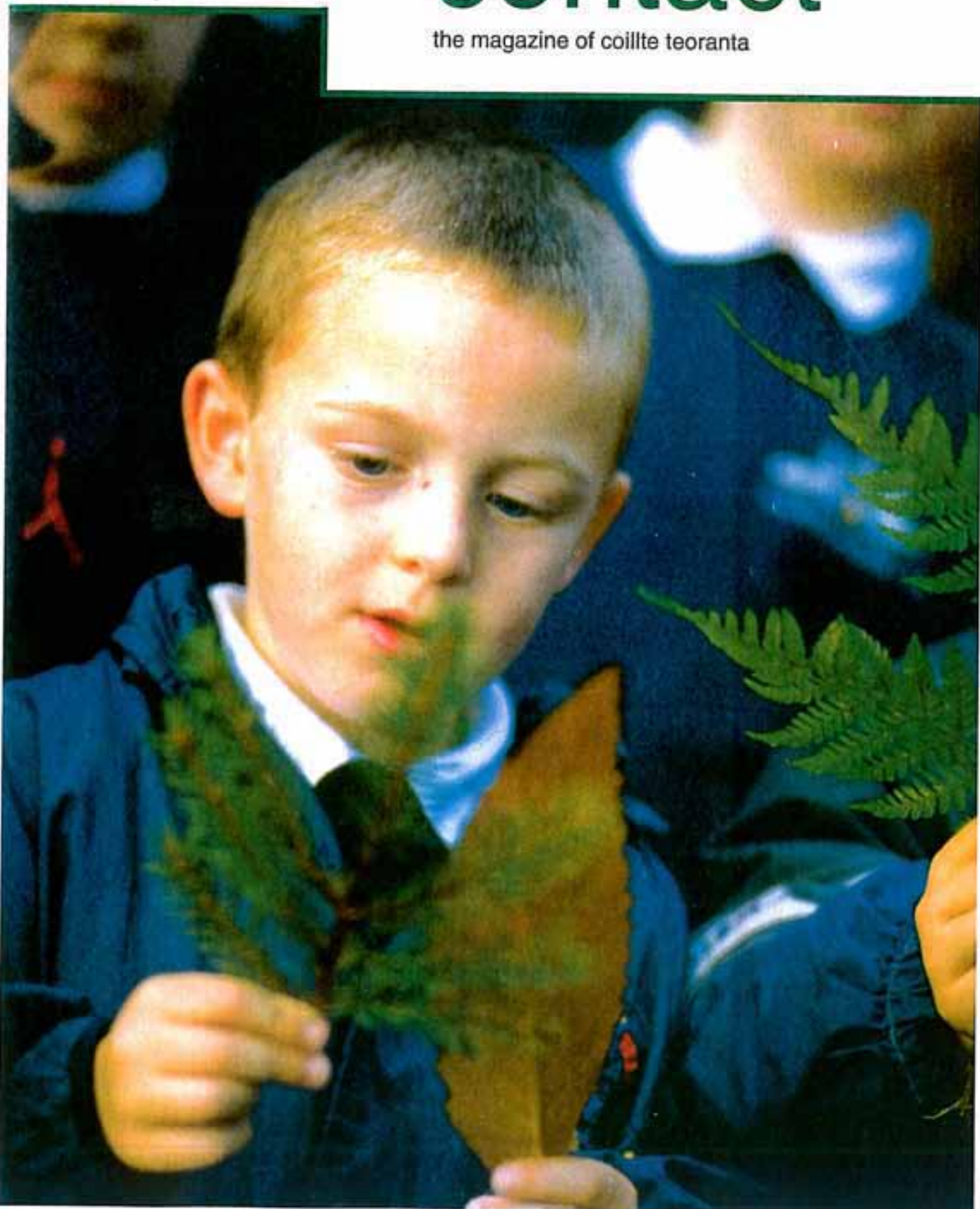
Looking towards Bengower (664m)

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Life - In phan mairiú

volume 16, number 1, 2004

the magazine of coillte teoranta



LIFE Update

2003 saw huge progress in Coillte's EU LIFE-Funded project, Restoring Active Blanket Bog in Ireland. Caroline White, one of the members of the Coillte LIFE Team reports...

Progress on our bog restoration project (LIFE02 NAT/IRL/8490) has been very satisfactory during 2003. Two successful audits by EU officials/consultants took place during the year, the 1st progress report has been submitted to Brussels, and numerous networking visits entertained from other similar projects. Specific 2003 achievements are outlined below.

2003 Operational Progress

- Work has now begun on all of the 14 sites
- Commercial felling conducted on 55 hectares
- Non-commercial felling of 240 hectares completed
- Felling and chipping of six hectares completed. The majority of the original programme here will have to be completed under non-commercial felling due to access, terrain and cost issues with regard to chipping
- Drain blocking installed on 110 hectares, using plastic piling material. A trial area where machine blocking will take place is also scheduled
- Fencing erected on 216 hectares
- Regeneration cleared on 59 hectares

2003 Communications

- Land Managers training course – 2 completed in Mayo FMUs
- Project Website up and running, linked with the Graduate Treasure Trail (Ireland's Essential Student Guide)
- Brochures distributed to a cross section of organisations such as - NPWS (National Parks and Wildlife Staff), Forest Service, Schools, Tree Council of Ireland, Irish Peatland Conservation Council, Society of Irish Foresters, Rural Environment

Protection Scheme representatives, Coillte Contractors/Suppliers together with other stakeholders in the FMUs where the sites are located.

- Media Publicity was widespread, with a number of articles inserted in local papers, Coillte Contact, Society of Irish Foresters newsletter, Environmental magazines, Irish Timber & Forestry Magazine etc. Our links with the Graduate Treasure Trail gained publicity in "The Daily Star" and on 2FM. Several radio interviews were held on environment programmes and local radio. The LIFE team are involved in ongoing networking. Part of the Project Group attended the Scottish Raised Bog Conference, and exchange visits from other groups to our project also took place.
- The construction of one Boardwalk was completed at the Slieve Blooms site, and planning is in progress for a further two (Eskeragh and Croaghonagh). Signs acknowledging EU LIFE funding have been erected on Demonstration sites.

Forward Plans

Plans for 2004 include continuing work on felling, drain blocking, fencing and other operational actions. Communications actions

will continue with the formal launch the project, visits by other project groups to see our work, further training courses for land managers, bog walks to coincide with international bog day in July, and quotes being sought to erect interpretative signage on the demonstration sites.

A very successful project management group (PMG) meeting and field day was held on 3rd/4th February 2004 in the Mayo area. Those who attended the field day (which concentrated on three sites - Bellaveeny, Eskeragh and Owenirragh) were project site managers (Seamus O'Connor and Joe McEvey), staff from the NPWS together with local contractor Sean Cosgrove who outlined some work being completed. Present also was the project contract ecologist and staff from Minerex who are completing a study on "groundwater flushes" on the Shanvolahan site. The Chairman of the PMG expressed his congratulations to all those involved in the project to date and commented on the excellent work and progress so far.

Other highlights during 2004 will be repeat visits by EU officials / consultants, and the submission of the project interim report at the halfway stage next July.

The project began in July 2002 and will finish in June 2006.

Caroline White



Drain blocking at LIFE Site, Croaghonagh, County Donegal

Stakeholder Field Days

During 2004, we hope to hold three field days for our stakeholders. The first of these days will take place on Tuesday 6th July in the Slieve Bloom Mountains. Participants will be taken to see an EU funded Life-Nature Blanket Bog Restoration project, a People's Millennium Forests site, and areas of biodiversity including an 80-year old stand of Sitka spruce. Lunch will be provided.

If you would like to attend this field day please register by sending an email to patricia.flanagan@coillte.ie or by phoning 0502-21617 or 086-8098598.

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Annual Report & Accounts 2004



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Coillte is also assisting the ISC in the development of a National Trails Strategy, which will examine the standard of way-marked ways, management options, resources available and the value of trails.

EU LIFE-Nature Projects

In 2002, Coillte secured support from the EU LIFE-Nature Programme for a four-year project entitled *Restoring Active Blanket Bog in Ireland*. Restoration work progressed well on the 14 sites by the end of 2004, with approximately 90% of trees removed and 70% of drains blocked. Further progress was made in fencing sites and in monitoring bog vegetation as an indicator of restoration potential. Boardwalk access has been provided on some sites.

During 2004, additional funding was received from the EU LIFE-Nature Programme to restore 571 hectares of raised bog on 14 sites in counties Cavan, Galway, Longford, Roscommon, Meath, Westmeath and Laois. This four-year project entitled *Restoring Raised Bog in Ireland* has similar objectives to the Blanket Bog project. By the end of 2004, site surveys had been conducted and water level gauges installed at some sites. Tree removal had also commenced at three of the sites.

Forest Protection

A new policy on forest security was completed during the year to protect Coillte's property and comply with its duty of care to staff, contractors and the general public. The policy outlines a new security management, monitoring and reporting system, introduces a code of practice, and addresses security issues such as timber movement, litter management, theft, land trespass, and other forms of encroachment.

COILLTE ENTERPRISES

Coillte Enterprises manages a portfolio of businesses based on the Group's assets and skills and includes:

- **Coillte Forestry Services** which provides planting and forest management services to private land owners, and undertakes all of Coillte's planting programme
- **Coillte Nurseries** which supplies plants for all internal needs and for external Irish and international markets
- **Land and Enterprises Development** which is responsible for adding value to the Group's land asset, and
- **Enterprise Operations** which manages a portfolio of businesses including Christmas Tree Farms, Wood Products, Tree Care Services, Training, and Leisure.

TIMBER & FORESTRY



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Forest Strategy Review Update

Peter Bacon and Associates, the consultants appointed by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mr. Joe Walsh TD, to carry out a study of forestry policy in Ireland, held a public information meeting in the Tullamore Court Hotel on Wednesday 7th April 2004.

Mr. Peter Bacon, Mr. Kevin Hannigan and Mr. Henry Phillips represented the consultants at the well attended meeting which was advertised in some national media.

During the meeting the consultants made a presentation outlining how they would approach the review. A lively debate and question and answer session followed the presentation.

The consultants also welcomed written submissions from interested parties. While not setting a deadline for receipt of submissions they indicated that they fully intended to present the final report to the Minister by September.

Speaking to Mr Bacon recently, he made it very clear that anyone who wishes to have input into the report must make a written submission. It appears unlikely that Mr. Bacon and Associates will be consulting directly with the various stakeholders in the forestry sector.

Email: peter.bacon@esatlink.com or
peter.cafferkey@agriculture.gov.ie

€4.2M Restoration Project

Mr. Joe Walsh, Minister for Agriculture and Food, has launched Ireland's largest bog restoration project at Eskeragh, Co. Mayo. Coillte have been working on this €4.2 million restoration project since 2002, restoring 14 bogland sites, most of which are located in the West of Ireland.

Bogs or peatlands are rich and diverse wetlands that represent a valuable environmental resource and Ireland's bogs are among the richest in Europe. Many of our rare and threatened species are associated with bogs, including merlin, otter, red grouse, dragonfly, and mosses and lichens. As wetlands that accumulate peat over thousands of years, intact bogs also have a very important role to play in reducing global warming, because they act as a carbon store.

Bogs originally covered vast areas of Ireland and, over the years, these bogs provide important sources of fuel and employment for local communities. In the 1970's and 1980's, forestry plantations were established on many bogs, with a view to deriving further income from these areas. The result of all of these landuse activities is

that most of our bogs have been hugely altered by drainage (i.e. drying out), peat removal and/or forest growth. They are no longer the wetland habitats they once were. Today, it is increasingly recognised that any remaining bogs - especially those that have not dried out - have very high environmental value and should be conserved as wetlands. Furthermore, some of the areas that were planted with forest have not dried out and should be restored to their original condition as wetland habitats. Coillte has identified over 1,200 hectares of its properties lie on peatlands that have the potential to be restored. [Coillte consulted with National Parks and Wildlife on the selection of suitable sites for restoration.]

Speaking at the launch, Martin Lowery, Coillte Chief Executive said "Nature Conservation is a very important part of forest and land management and Coillte is delighted to receive funding from the EU LIFE-Nature Programme to carry out this project". The Project is jointly funded by Coillte and DG-Environment under the EU LIFE-Nature Programme and will run until 2006.

COFORD SUPPORTS NEW PROJECTS

COFORD has recently finalised negotiations with a number of research teams on a number of new projects. One project in particular caught my attention. Following is a reproduced from COFORD'S June electronic newsletter - edited by Joe O'Carroll. Readers who would like to receive the COFORD newsletter can subscribe at www.coford.ie

Reinforced Polymer Timbers

This project is led by Dr Annette Harte, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Timber is a very attractive construction material for many reasons. It is a renewable resource, recyclable, relatively inexpensive and has an excellent strength to weight ratio. It is also architecturally attractive, possesses excellent thermal properties and is resistant to many of the chemicals destructive to steel and concrete. However, wood also possesses weaknesses as a construction material, such as anisotropy, inhomogeneity and wide variations in mechanical properties. The use of Irish grown Sitka spruce in the construction industry is limited mainly to low load applications due to its strength and stiffness values.

In order for this species to be used more widely, its structural properties must be enhanced. This may be achieved by reinforcing with a stiffer material. Steel reinforcement has been in use for a considerable period of time but this technology has limitations including the resulting increase in weight of the structure and the

susceptibility to corrosion. In recent times, there has been considerable interest in the use of fibre reinforced plastics (FRP) for the enhancement of the structural performance of timbers. Advantages of FRPs include their low weight, ease of handling and corrosion resistance. The application of this innovative technology to local wood species has been the subject of much research, particularly in the US and to a lesser extent in Europe.

The application of FRP technology to the enhancement of the structural performance of Sitka spruce opens up considerable opportunities for the more widespread use of this material. The primary objective of this project is to examine the feasibility of a number of different reinforcement materials and geometrical configurations for increasing the structural performance of Irish grown Sitka spruce wood beams. As a result of experimental and numerical studies recommendations will be produced on the most appropriate FRPs and adhesive products for use with this timber. Recommendations on the optimum procedures for producing FRP reinforced beams will also be included. This project will run for three years and is largely being funded through a Irish Research Council grant, with additional support from COFORD Coillte and an NUI Millennium Research grant.

The Birds and the Trees - the ECO-UNESCO & ENFO Young Environmentalist Awards 2004

The senior winning team from Colaiste Muire in Ennis was awarded the environmental premier award for their work to conserve tree species in the Ennis locality. Their project, entitled "Planting for the Future" surveyed trees planted 14 years ago in Ennis town and raised sponsorship to replenish tree numbers and species in the town and local schools. The group highlighted the importance of trees in their locality by taking to the streets of Ennis to sell trees to the public on Valentine's Day, with the slogan "Plant a Tree for Your Loved One!"

Crann

Ireland's Tree Magazine

Summer 2004 • Number 85

Bees n' Trees

BIRD CHANGES IN WOODLAND

ABC of Trees



Planting Trees • Protecting Woodlands

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The Restoration of Blanket Bog in Ireland

John Conaghan

In 2002 Coillte commenced an important blanket bog restoration project. This project, jointly funded by Coillte and DG-Environment under the EU LIFE-Nature Programme, is a four-year scheme the primary aim of which is to achieve restoration of blanket bog habitat within 1212 hectares of land owned by Coillte. The main focus of the project, active blanket bog, is listed as a priority habitat for conservation under Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive and the areas for restoration either lie within, or occur adjacent to, proposed Special Areas of Conservation. A total of 14 blanket bog sites, most of which are located along the western seaboard of Ireland, have been selected for restoration. At most sites the main restoration measures to be employed are the removal of conifers and the blocking of any existing drains.

Although the sites are afforested to varying degrees, most still contain significant areas of blanket bog vegetation. The main plant species growing in these areas are purple moor-grass (*Moinea caerulea*), black bog rush (*Sclerocarpus nigricans*), ling (*Calluna vulgaris*), cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*), many-flowered bog-cotton (*Ericolorum angustifolium*) and various *Sphagnum* mosses. As the sites vary in terms of plantation age a number of approaches are required in order to achieve restoration of the blanket bog habitat.

FELLING OF PLANTED AREAS WITH TALL, CLOSED-CANOPY CONIFERS

In these areas the timber is being extracted by conventional harvesting methods. Trees are being removed and afterwards the ground surface is covered with a mixture of wide brush mats and areas with a patchy cover of brush remaining after harvesting. As there is generally little bog vegetation remaining in areas which have been under tall conifers for 30 to 40 years it is anticipated that recovery of bog vegetation at these sites will be slow, especially in the short term.

FELLING OF PLANTED AREAS WITH LOW, SPARSE CONIFERS

At many sites there are areas of conifer plantation which are small in stature either due to their young age or due to poor growth rates. As a result of the trees in these areas not having achieved a closed canopy, there is usually a high cover of bog vegetation mostly dominated by either purple moor-grass or ling heather. Most of the trees in these areas are being felled manually by chainsaw and left on site. In order to increase the area of open ground at these sites the felled trees are being wind-towed. At a couple of sites in Co. Mayo the felled trees



are being chipped by machines. The chipping and wind-throwing of trees clears the ground surface of woody material which facilitates the more rapid recovery of the bog vegetation. The prospects for the recovery of bog vegetation in these areas are generally good.

FELLING OF REGENERATING CONIFERS

If a blanket bog surface is drying out it may be prone to colonisation from conifers sprouting in from adjacent areas of plantation. In such areas there is generally a low density of trees present and, as a result, these trees can be removed by manual felling. The felling of conifers regenerating on intact blanket bog is being carried out at a number of sites in the Slieve Bloom.

BLOCKING OF DRAINS

Any active drains within the site areas are being dammed, by hand, using interlocking plastic piling dams. The blocking of drains with post is also being carried out at a number of sites. This blocking of drains will slow water movement and thus reduce the rate water loss from the sites. This reduction in the rate of water loss will, in turn, lead to an elevation of water levels in the surrounding areas and assist the restoration of bog. The damming of drains is being carried out to varying extents at all sites and the changes in water levels within the post is being assessed using a number of Water Level Range Gauges (WLRGs).

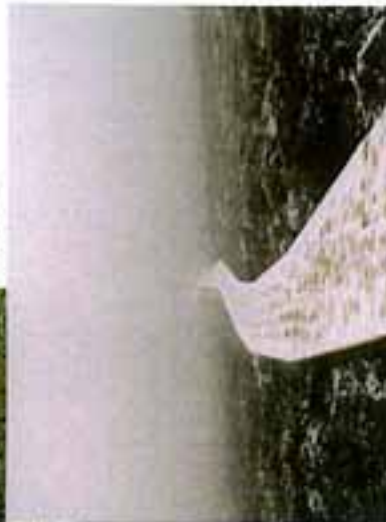
The efficacy of these various restoration measures are being monitored over the lifetime of the project. Changes in the vegetation will be monitored by means of permanent plots which will be surveyed at regular intervals. The quality of water in streams which flow out of felled areas is also being monitored at a number of locations. Although the rehabilitation of active blanket bog habitat may take decades to achieve at some of the sites it is anticipated that by the end of this project the regeneration of blanket bog vegetation will be well progressed. Another important aspect of this project is that it will provide valuable information concerning the practicability of blanket bog restoration in Ireland. This information will be of considerable value to any future bog restoration programmes in the country.

For further information please contact Kevin Donnellan or Carolina White at Coillte: caroline.white@coillte.ie

Capacity signs on the site have been felled by chainsaw and removed using a log ground pressure excavator. The drains are now blocked.

Left: Blocking drains at the Crosspatrick Site, County Donegal.

Below: Downfall in the Slieve Bloom in winter.



Country / Pays:

Themes / Thèmes:

Category / Catégorie: After / après: and before / et avant: Including the word/ Incluant le mot:

Matching event(s) / Événements correspondants : (1-10) per page 38

VIIth General Assembly Friends of the Countryside - Meta

Cork (IRL)

Date:
20/05/2004

Réunions / Meetings - Natura 2000 - Green Days / Natura 2000 - Green Days

Contact:
fcs@friendsofthecountryside.net**Biodiversity Day, Clare**

Dromore Wood Nature Reserve, Ruan, Co. Clare (IRL)

Date: 22/05/2004

Réunions / Meetings - Natura 2000 - Green Days / Natura 2000 - Green Days

Contact:
ekeegan@clarecoco.ie**"A Celebratory Launch" - Restoring Active Blanket Bog in Irela**

At Eskeragh Life Demonstration Site, Crossmolina, Co. Mayo (IRL)

Date: 03/06/2004

Réunions / Meetings - Natura 2000 - Green Days / Natura 2000 - Green Days

Contact:
caroline.white@coillte.ie**Guided Hill Walk (5 hours)**

Glenveagh Mountains National Park (IRL)

Date: 06/06/2004

Sorties de terrain / Walks - Natura 2000 - Green Days / Natura 2000 - Green Days

Contact: talcorn@duchas.ie**Studying Elusive Animals - otters stoats and pine martins**

Wicklow Mountains National Park (IRL)

Date:
10/06/2004

Conférences / Talks & Conferences - Natura 2000 - Green Days / Natura 2000 - Green Days

Contact:
educationcentrewicklow@duchas.ie**Guided Hill Walk (5 hours)**

Glenveagh Mountains National Park (IRL)

Date: 11/06/2004

Sorties de terrain / Walks - Natura 2000 - Green Days / Natura 2000 - Green Days

Contact: talcorn@duchas.ie**Bog Slides - a multimedia exploration of the phenomena**

Wicklow Mountains National Park (IRL)

Date:
17/06/2004

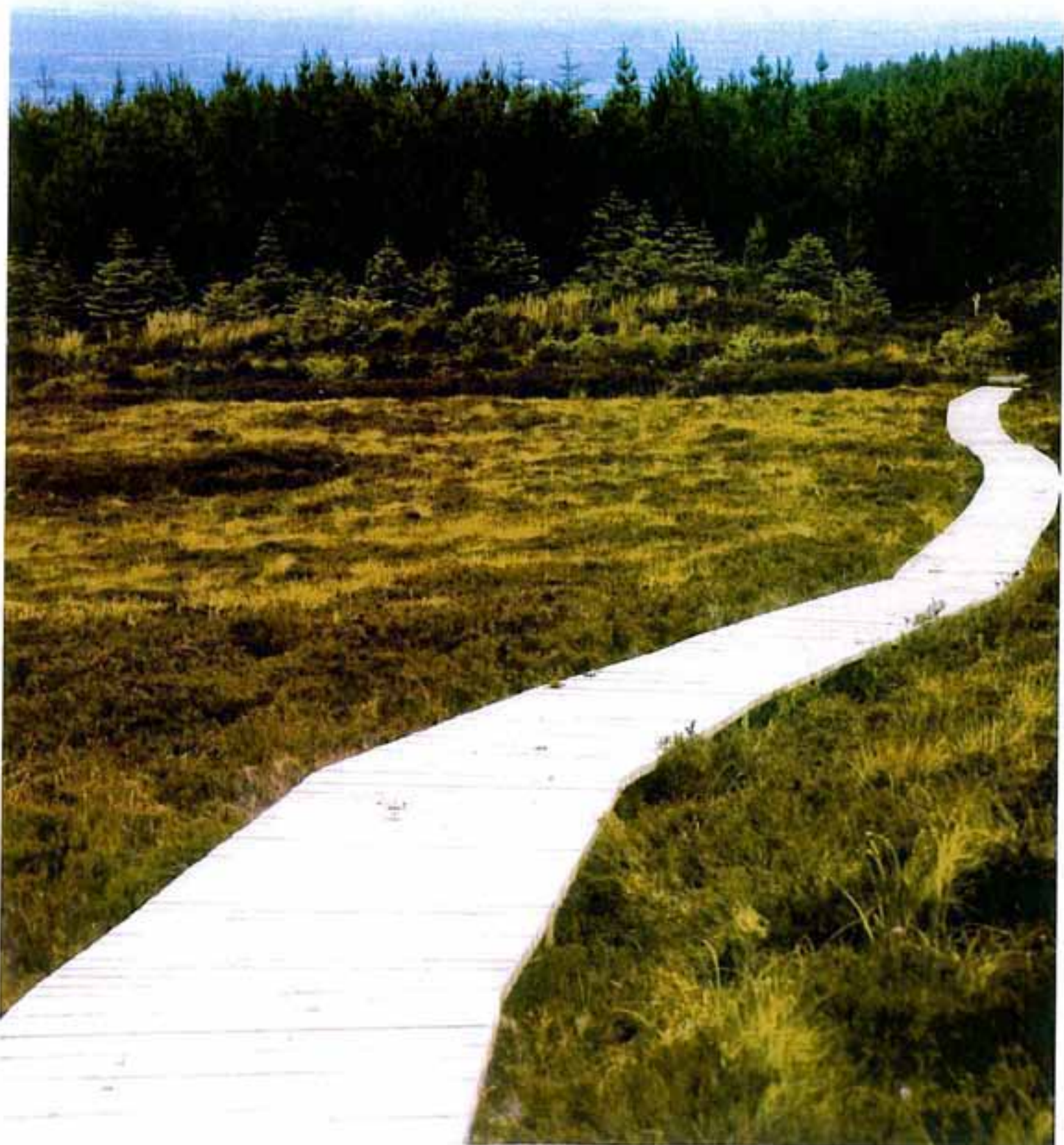
Conférences / Talks & Conferences - Natura 2000 - Green Days / Natura 2000 - Green Days

Contact:
educationcentrewicklow@duchas.ie

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the magazine of coillte teoranta



Minister launches Bog Life

Mr. Joe Walsh, Minister for Agriculture and Food, launched Ireland's largest bog restoration project at Eskeragh, Co. Mayo on June 3rd 2004. Coillte have been working on this €4.2 million restoration project since 2002, restoring 14 bogland sites, most of which are located in the West of Ireland. Speaking at the launch, Minister Joe Walsh said "Coillte's LIFE-Nature Project is the first of its kind in Ireland to be run by a key Natura 2000 land-owner and stakeholder. The demonstration site at Eskeragh will provide a focus for raising public awareness of the major habitat restoration project being carried out by Coillte on over 1,200 hectares of blanket bog mainly along the western seaboard".

Bogs or peatlands are rich and diverse wetlands that represent a valuable environmental resource and Ireland's bogs are among the richest in Europe. Many of our rare and threatened species are associated with bogs, including merlin, otter, red grouse,

dragonfly, and mosses and lichens. As wetlands that accumulate peat over thousands of years, intact bogs also have a very important role to play in reducing global warming, because they act as a carbon store.

Bogs originally covered vast areas of Ireland and, over the years, these bogs provide important sources of fuel and employment for local communities. In the 1970s and 1980s, forestry plantations were established on many bogs, with a view to deriving further income from these areas. The result of all of these landuse activities is that most of our bogs have been hugely altered by drainage (i.e. drying out), peat removal and/or forest growth. They are no longer the wetland habitats they once were. Today, it is increasingly recognised that any remaining bogs, especially those that have not dried out, have very high environmental value and should be conserved as wetlands. Furthermore, some of the areas that were planted with forest have not dried out and should be restored to their original condition as wetland habitats. Coillte has identified over 1,200 hectares of peatlands on its estate that have

the potential to be restored. The restoration work carried out under this project includes: blocking drains to re-flood the bog and recreate wetland conditions, remove planted trees and naturally regenerating trees onto the bog, and fencing to exclude grazing animals.

The Site at Eskeragh is one of five demonstration sites for the project and work there is well advanced, this includes removal of the trees, drain blocking, water level monitoring and boardwalk construction for viewing the site. Many groups from the UK and Scotland have visited this site and are impressed with progress which is obvious due to the presence of characteristic bog vegetation especially bog cotton and mosses. Similar progress has been made at most of the 13 other sites, visit www.irishbogrestorationproject.ie for details.

This bog restoration project is one of many initiatives that Coillte is currently undertaking as part of its Nature Conservation Programme which was initiated in 1998. Speaking at the launch, Martin Lowery, Coillte Chief Executive said "Nature Conservation is a very important part of forest and land management and Coillte is delighted to receive funding from the EU LIFE-Nature Programme to carry out this project". The Project is jointly funded by Coillte and DG-Environment under the EU LIFE-Nature Programme and will run until 2006. The EU LIFE-Nature Programme was launched in 1991, to contribute to the implementation of EU nature protection legislation and in particular the establishment of the 'Natura 2000' networks of sites for the conservation of Europe's most remarkable flora and fauna. A European Commission spokesman said that the Commission was very pleased to be associated with a project of this type in Ireland.

Caroline White
Cilodhna Parker



Blocking a drain at the site in Eskeragh blanket bog. At the launch of Coillte's EU-LIFE Nature Blanket Bog Project were (left to right) Minister Joe Walsh, Brendan McKenna (Chairman, Coillte), and Martin Lowery

"Winners" through EU LIFE-Nature Blanket Bog Project

Coillte, through their jointly-funded EU LIFE-Nature "Restoring Active Blanket Bog" project, is supporting and is involved in a schools educational programme, called *The Graduate Treasure Trail*.

What is the Graduate Treasure Trail?

The Graduate Treasure Trail on-line Quiz is aimed at primary and secondary level students throughout Ireland. The purpose of the quiz is to promote civic awareness, research politics, environment, EU Affairs, health and safety, the Irish language, government services and improve IT skills.

How does it work?

Each institution, of which Coillte is one, involved in the project, develops 36 questions about the information on their website, in this case our EU LIFE-Nature Restoring Active Blanket Bog website. These are then supplied to the Graduate and will feature in the weekly quiz.

The quiz is published online on www.graduate.ie for 36 weeks running. Every question has a link to the relevant institution website and students must read the institution's website material to find the answer to the questions. For Coillte's Blanket Bog project, this has the benefit of ensuring students research their answers and while doing this gain awareness of what the objectives and aims of the project are.

Presentation Ceremony

Caroline White, PR/Administration Manager of the Coillte LIFE Project, attended the "Graduate Presentation Ceremony" on April 24th 2004, in the Regency Hotel, Dublin and presented a voucher for DELL IT equipment to student Jane O'Hara on behalf of this jointly funded EU LIFE-Nature project between Coillte and DG-Environment. Coillte's involvement in the "Graduate Treasure Trail" has ensured extensive coverage for the project on both national radio (2FM-Rick O'Shea show) and newspaper (Irish Daily Star).

Caroline White

Coillte Landscaping construct Sustainable Trail for Killarney National Park

Coillte Landscaping division moved into a new area of environmental activity when they won the tender to construct a sustainable mountain path to the summit of Torc Mountain (535 m) in Killarney National Park for the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

Mountain footpath erosion is a growing problem in Ireland as more walkers take to the hills to enjoy the mountain scenery and sense of solitude. The NPWS and volunteer organisations such as Mountain Meitheal, which grew out of Coillte's own Meitheal, have for the last



Student Jane O'Hara, Ursuline College, Sligo receiving a voucher for DELL IT equipment which she won for her school from Ms Caroline White, representing a jointly funded Nature Conservation Project between Coillte and EU DG - Environment. This project focuses on restoring active blanket bog in Ireland. Jane also won a free trip to the European Parliament in Strasbourg which was sponsored by the European Parliament's Dublin office.



Airlifting railway sleepers for the board walk

Land Managers get out on the bogs!!

On a beautiful sunny Wednesday last May, a number of Coillte land managers took to the bogs of Co. Mayo. The occasion, a LIFE Project Land Managers Training course.

The course was organised by Caroline White, and was given by Catherine O'Connell, Chief Executive of the Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC). The IPCC is an independent conservation charity, which was established in 1982 to campaign for the conservation of living intact Irish bogs and peatlands as part of Ireland's heritage. Their conservation work includes, purchasing bogland nature reserves, providing resources and training for teachers and education groups, repairing and restoring damaged bogs, and fostering a positive attitude towards bogs. Coillte was delighted to seize the opportunity to work together with the IPCC on this very worthwhile course. A cross-section of land managers from a number of areas within the company attended. The course involved a slide show on blanket bog formation, ecology, flora, fauna and threats to conservation. All participants then had the opportunity of using a BOGWATCH flower dial (a tool to

help identify key bog flora) to see if they could identify bog flora. After lunch it was out to the bog (Eskeragh LIFE site) to undertake quadrat studies, bog flora identification, pond dipping to sample invertebrates, biodiversity recording and conservation evaluation of the site. Local site manager, Joe McEvey, then outlined the ongoing restoration work at the site, which includes felling to waste, drain blocking and water-level monitoring. He then invited the group to view the newly-constructed boardwalk. Catherine O'Connell complimented Coillte on the restoration work being carried out and said she was glad to hear about the raised bog proposal. She also invited project staff to give a talk on the restoration work to date to the IPCC.

Those that attended the course gave very positive feedback. "I certainly found the day very worthwhile, and have increased my knowledge of blanket bogs", said Richard Jack, Resource Manager, Clonastee, Laois. Eugene Griffin, District Team Leader, Sligo/Leitrim, reported .. "most enjoyable and educational day out, thanks!"

The land managers training courses form part of the project actions for our blanket bog restoration project (project number: LIFE02 NAT/IRL/8490). Further courses will be organised over the coming months.

Caroline White



Catherine O'Connell (far right) from the IPCC puts a group of Coillte staff to the test of identifying the flora of a Blanket bog.

Coillte spotted at Cork Week Sailing Regatta

At the recent Cork Week sailing regatta, Galway Bay Sailing Club entry, 'Dark Angel', achieved 3rd place in Class One. Class One had 39 entrants with crews from Ireland, UK, France and Denmark represented in the class. In total, 609 boats raced in the event in 18 different classes. Yachts of all sizes from 19 ft boats to the massive 86 footers Pyewacket (USA) and Morning Glory (Germany) competed in the week-long event, now recognised as the largest fun sailing regatta in the world. All of this held in the little village of Crosshaven, just south of Cork City!

Coillte's Daithi de Forge crews on 'Dark Angel' in the position of bowman. The boat is owned by Connemara man, Eamonn Conneely, and has a regular crew of nine for racing events. The home club for the boat is Galway Bay Sailing Club near Oranmore in Galway, where training began in the icy waters there last March! The boat is proving to be quite competitive on the circuit this year, coming 2nd in the April League in Kinsale, 3rd in the Irish National Championships in Howth (May) and 2nd in the Scottish Series held in Lough Fyne in Western Scotland (June). Upcoming events for the boat include the Middle Sea race in Southern Italy in September where a highly competitive international fleet is expected.



Coillte's Daithi de Forge (foreground) competing in the Cork Week regatta on the boat 'Dark Angel' from Galway Bay Sailing Club.

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“Coillte is delighted to lead this project to restore and protect such a valuable habitat for the overall good of the Irish environment, of which our forests are a substantial part.”

Martin Lowery, Chief Executive, Coillte Teoranta



Coillte Teoranta restoring the peatlands of the west

Business Issue The peatlands of the west of Ireland are among the most important intact areas of blanket bog found in Europe. In the past, blanket boglands were extensively afforested and unfenced open areas which were heavily overgrazed. This resulted in a degradation and drying out of the habitat. As part of their nature conservation strategy initiated in 1998, Coillte decided to address this problem.

Solution Applied

- The Blanket Bog Restoration Project is a nature conservation initiative jointly funded by Coillte and the European Commission under the EU LIFE-Nature Programme. A broad range of stakeholders were identified and consulted in this initiative including local community organisations, environmental and nature conservation organisations and local authorities. The project aims to restore 14 bogland sites (approximately 1,200 hectares) and create a high quality area of active blanket bog by:
 - Fencing to gain control of open bog areas
 - Ditch blocking to restore the bog natural water levels
 - Restoring 500 hectares to enlarge the blanket bog area
 - Removing naturally regenerated trees from the open bogs.

Benefits for the Company

- According to Martin Lowery, Chief Executive, “Coillte is delighted to lead this project to restore and protect such a valuable habitat for the overall good of the Irish environment, of which our forests are a substantial part.”

Benefits for the Stakeholder

- Peatlands are unique ecosystems comprising 95% water. They support a combination of plants and animals that do not exist

in other habitats. The disappearance of Irish bogs would have serious consequences. The last remaining European refuge for various plant and animal species would be destroyed and several species of bird would lose important winter feeding grounds. This project will:

- Reverse the negative effects associated with afforestation such as drainage and overgrazing
- Extend the area of blanket bog
- Help to regenerate the natural flora of the bog including bog cotton, sphagnum, bog moss, flowering plants, heathers, sedges and grasses.

Department involved in the Solution
Coillte LIFE Nature Programme.

Solution Champions

Kevin Donnellan and Caroline White

Email: kevin.donnellan@coillte.ie, caroline.white@coillte.ie

Full details of the Case Study are available on www.bitc.ie

TIMBER & FORESTRY



September/October 2004 Volume 13 • No. 5

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Photo 3
Nephin Bog Forest - Challenging
forest management within a
sensitive water catchment area.
Photo: Society of Irish Foresters

The West Awake! - Part 1

Bog restoration, River Catchment and Ecosystem management, Low Production Forests and a unique Atlantic Oakwood were the focal points of the **Society of Irish Foresters** summer Study Tour to the West of Ireland. Teagasc Forestry Adviser, **Noel Kennedy** reports on the tour in this, the first of a two part series of articles.

As part of the celebration of the Centenary of state forestry in Ireland the Society of Irish Foresters held a two day study tour of Galway and Mayo in June. The tour highlighted how modern forestry in the West has adapted to and embraces a range of environmental and management issues. The tour was led by Tony Mannion, Technical Director of the Society.

DAY 1

The group of thirty participants travelled from the tour base in Westport to for its first stop at an active Blanket bog restoration project at Eskeragh Bog near Crossmolina in North Mayo.

The bog restoration is part of a nature conservation project funded jointly by Coillte and EU under the LIFE programme. Kevin Donnellan, Coillte who is Project Manager for the EU LIFE Blanket Bog restoration project explained that it is focusing on the restoration of 1200 hectares of blanket bog at 14 counties - mainly along the western seaboard. All of the sites are in candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC) and have been

impacted in some way by afforestation and associated activities. Most of the project sites are located in North Mayo which features the most extensive areas of lowland blanket bog in the country and which also contains sensitive river catchments.

Dr. John Conaghan, Project Ecologist emphasised the uniqueness of active blanket bogs on a global scale. He stressed however that the Irish blanket bog which has been developing over the past 6-7000 years is

different to those in other countries and this makes it all the more important for conservation. He explained the term "active" blanket bog denotes a living bog that is accumulating peat.

Eskeragh Bog comprises two separate blocks totalling 40 hectares. Most of the area was planted with Sitka spruce and Lodgepole pine in 1983. The spruce grew poorly and as part of the project the entire area was felled to waste in May 2003.

Because Eskeragh like the other project sites was

extensively afforested or subject to overgrazing in unfenced areas, the project encompasses the following actions within the bog:

- Fencing the site to prevent grazing.
- Removal of planted and self-seeded plantation trees.
- Reflooding of the bog by the blocking of drains.
- Monitoring of the water table.

Using a specially constructed boardwalk the group made their way into the heart of the bog for a closer look. Although some of the forestry drains have been dammed using special plastic "drain blockers" (See Photo 1) the widespread presence of Ling heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) reflected the drying out of the bog since planting. Further evidence of drying out is the natural regeneration of Willow and Lodgepole pine. The Willow will not be removed at present as a wait and see policy is adopted but the Lodgepole pine regeneration will be removed immediately.

The function of the drain blockers is to control water movement in the bog and increase the soil water table to within 15 cm of the surface. In time it is hoped

that a higher water table will encourage the regeneration of classic blanket bog vegetation. The drain blockers will be left in place and vegetation allowed to grow over them.

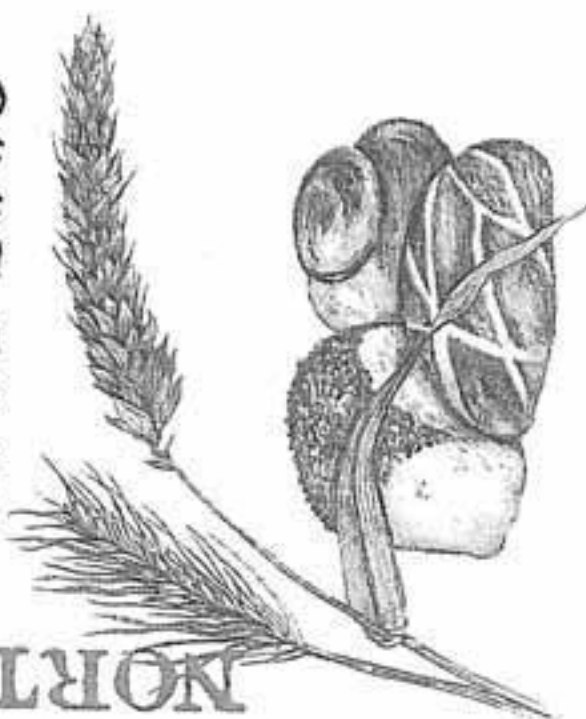
The group then moved to a separate area originally planted with Lodgepole pine which was clearfelled in July 2002. Of this 5 hectares of poorly growing conifers were cut by chainsaw and chipped in July 2002. The remaining area was windrowed. Because of the poor growth of the forest crop the bog had not dried as much as the first area and natural bog vegetation was more evident. Following the damming of a number of drains the wetness of the site was reflected by the rapid spread of Sphagnum moss (*Sphagnum capillifolium*) in the drains. Other positive indicator species present were Bog Cotton (*Eriophorum vaginatum*), Bog Bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Bog Myrtle (*Myrica gale*), *Hypnum cupressiforme* and *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*. (See Photo 2) It is expected that as a result of the measures being taken that active blanket bog regeneration will be rapid.

On the completion of drain blocking the extent of vegetation recovery and the status of the soil water table will be subject to constant monitoring. Plans are in place by Coillte for



Photo 1
Bog drain blockers
are important tools
in Blanket Bog
restoration.
Photo: Society of
Irish Foresters

NORTH WEST Organic Guide 2004-2005



David Connors
Riss, Blacklion, Co. Cavan

Contact:
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087 2202139

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info@enfo.ie

Ireland's public environmental and sustainable development information service. Provides excellent information, especially products aimed at school environmental projects. Website includes contact details for extensive range of environmental NGOs.

(NOTE: For this reason, we have refrained from reproducing easy-to-read contact details for a variety of organisations in this Guide. Please refer to ENFO website instead)

Restoring Active Blanket Bog in Ireland

Contact:
Telephone:
Website:
Email:

Caroline White
071 9162663
www.trillobogrestorationproject.ie
Caroline.white@collis.ie

This nature restoration project jointly funded by EU DG Environment and Cullin Tourism (The Irish Forestry Board) under the EU LIFE-Nature Programme is currently making good progress. Restoration work ranges from tree removal, fencing, blocking drains, and removal of self-seeding trees from blanket bog habitat.

coillte contact

volume 16, number 2, 2004

the magazine of coillte teoranta



- The high demand for Sitka timber from Irish industry, while our industry does not want it since it is not included in the National Standard for construction materials! At the moment an ongoing project in Norway will test strength properties of Sitka in order to include it in the National Standard. We hope this work will solve many of the obstacles we face when marketing our Sitka.
- The clear policy of efficiency and accountability from seed to industry, while also putting effort into incorporating public and environmental demands into your forest management.

Future collaboration?

Keeping in mind the similarities and differences between our homelands, I can think of several reasons why it will be interesting to follow development in Ireland in the future, and possibly reasons why it could be interesting for foresters in Ireland to follow events back here. From our point of view, your fresh approach when building up a highly efficient forestry sector and industry more or less from scratch, is an interesting development for us where the forestry sector even in areas dominated by afforestation still is largely traditional.

The work being done over here on wood properties and how it fits into our National Standard could possibly be of interest for you.

I also noticed all the singing. I knew that the Irish could sing, while I wasn't quite aware that Norwegians had that much singing in them. A side effect. It could be interesting to pursue further contact...

Lastly: tusen takk (thanks a lot)! On behalf of the organising group I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Coillte, who got an e-mail from out of nowhere and decided that it would assist in organising a trip for this group of foresters from the very north of Norway. Especially I would like to thank Michéal O'Laighleis for responding to our various wishes and putting

together a most interesting program for our visit. Our gratitude also goes to Mick O'Brien and the many other people of Coillte assisting during the visit. On behalf of the foresters of Nordland county I wish to welcome you all to our part of the world and our forests over here, and look forward to host you in private or professional capacities. You have set a very high standard for us to follow.

På gjensyn (until next time)

Bjørn Rakstang
District forester for Loloten and Vesterålen



One is Arthur Buckley receiving a small gift from the Finnish translator following a most interesting meeting in Glendine

Finnish Foresters visit Ireland

On Friday 16th April, a group of Finnish forestry people visited Coillte for one day as part of a social visit to Ireland from Tampere. They work for Metsakeskus, which is a network of thirteen regional offices of the Finnish Forest Centres. These offices provide an advisory and support service and oversee other work areas such as environment, heritage, conservation and legal issues. In addition, they facilitate co-operation between forestry organisations.

The group were treated to a tour at Glendine and a presentation by Arthur Buckley. Arthur fascinated the group with his stories of seed

collection from those same trees 40 years ago, where the seed collectors used a 'bicycle' to reach the tree top and sometimes hopped from one tree top to the next!

Richard Jack then gave them an insight into forestry in the Slieve Blooms and the views that can be seen all around.

Hosts for the day were John Lyons and Mick Fenton and following a presentation on Irish Forestry to the group the bus departed from the Montague Hotel to various sites for the remainder of the day. The remainder of their visit was spent socialising in Dublin, visiting castles in the midlands as well as the Tullamore Dew Heritage centre.

John Lyons
Patricia Flanagan



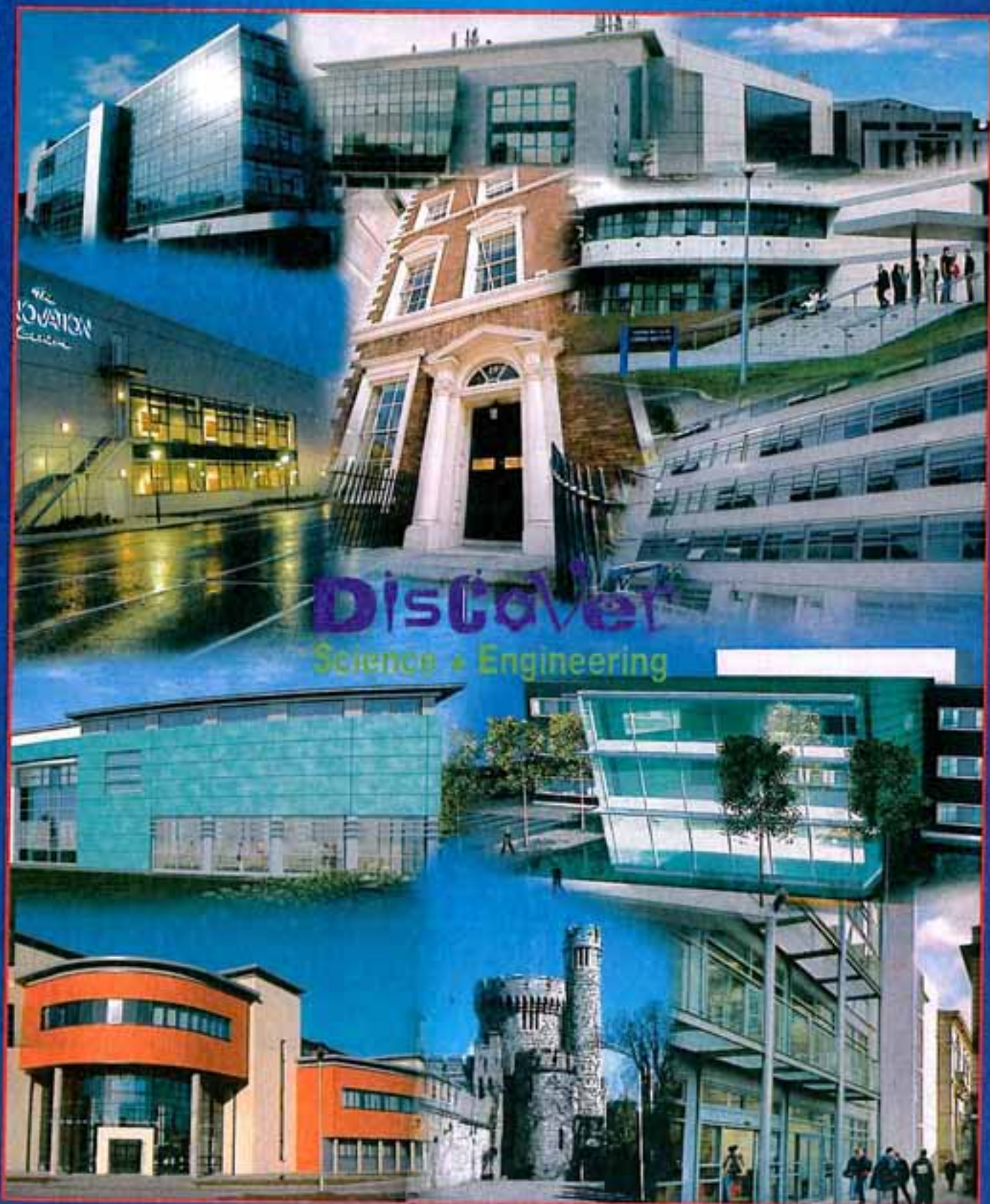
Our Finnish visitors enjoy the brisk weather in the Slieve Blooms. Photo includes Mick Fenton and John Lyons (back row, second and third from right)

The Irish Scientist

No. 12, November 2004

2004 YEAR BOOK

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The restoration of blanket bog in Ireland

In 2002, Coillte began an important blanket bog restoration project. This project, jointly funded by Coillte and DG-Environment under the EU LIFE-Nature Programme, is a four-year scheme, the primary aim of which is to achieve restoration of blanket bog habitat within 1212 hectares of land owned by Coillte. The main focus of the project, active blanket bog, is listed as a priority habitat for conservation under Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive, and the areas for restoration either lie within, or occur adjacent to, proposed Special Areas of Conservation. A total of 14 blanket bog sites, most of which are located along the western seaboard of Ireland, have been selected for restoration. At most sites, the main restoration measures to be employed are the removal of conifers and the blocking of any existing drains.



Consultations on site

Although the sites are afforested to varying degrees, most still contain significant areas of blanket bog vegetation. The main plant species growing in these areas are purple moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), black bog rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), ling (*Calluna vulgaris*), cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*), many-flowered bog-cotton (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), and various *Sphagnum* mosses. As the sites vary in terms of plantation age, a number of approaches are required in order to achieve restoration of the blanket bog habitat.

Felling of planted areas with tall, closed-canopy conifers

In these areas, the timber is being extracted by conventional harvesting methods. Trees are being removed and afterwards the ground surface is covered with a mixture of wide brush mats, and areas with a patchy cover of brush remain after harvesting. As there is generally little bog vegetation remaining in areas which have been under tall conifers for 30 to 40 years, it is anticipated that recovery of bog vegetation at these sites will be slow, especially in the short term.

Felling of planted areas with low, sparse conifers

At many sites, there are areas of conifer plantation which are small in stature either due to their young age or due to poor growth rates.



Felling to waste, Eskeragh, near Crossmolina, Co. Mayo

As a result of the trees in these areas not having achieved a closed canopy, there is usually a high cover of bog vegetation, mostly dominated by either purple moor-grass or ling heather. Most of the trees in these areas are being felled manually by chainsaw and left on site. In order to increase the area of open ground at these sites, the felled trees are being wind-rowed. At a couple of sites in Co. Mayo the felled trees are being chipped by machine. The chipping and wind-rowing of trees clears the ground surface of woody material, which facilitates the more rapid recovery of the bog vegetation. The prospects for the recovery of bog vegetation in these areas are generally good.

Felling of regenerating conifers

If a blanket bog surface is drying out, it may be prone to colonisation from conifers seeding in from adjacent areas or plantation. In such areas, there is generally a low density of trees present and, as a result, these trees can be removed by manual felling. The felling of conifers regenerating on intact blanket bog is being carried out at a number of sites in the Slieve Blooms.

Blocking of drains

Any active drains within the site areas are being dammed, by hand, using interlocking plastic piling dams. The blocking of drains with peat is also being carried out at a number of sites. This blocking of drains will slow water movement and thus reduce the rate of water loss from the sites. This reduction in the rate of water loss will, in turn, lead to an elevation of water levels in the surrounding areas and assist the restoration of bog. The damming of drains is being carried out to varying extents at all sites, and the changes in water levels within the peat are being assessed using a number of Water Level Range Gauges (WaLRaGs).



Drain blocking, Croaghonagh, Co. Donegal

The efficacy of these various restoration measures is being monitored over the lifetime of the project. Changes in bog vegetation will be monitored by means of permanent plots which will be surveyed at regular intervals. The quality of water streams which flow out of felled areas is also being monitored at a number of locations. Although the rehabilitation of active blanket bog habitat may take decades to achieve at some of the sites, it is anticipated that, by the end of this project, the regeneration of blanket bog vegetation will be well progressed. Another important aspect of this project is that it will provide valuable information concerning the practicalities of blanket bog restoration in Ireland. This information will be of considerable value to any future blanket bog restoration programmes in the country. Work on this project began in July 2002 and will run until June 2006.

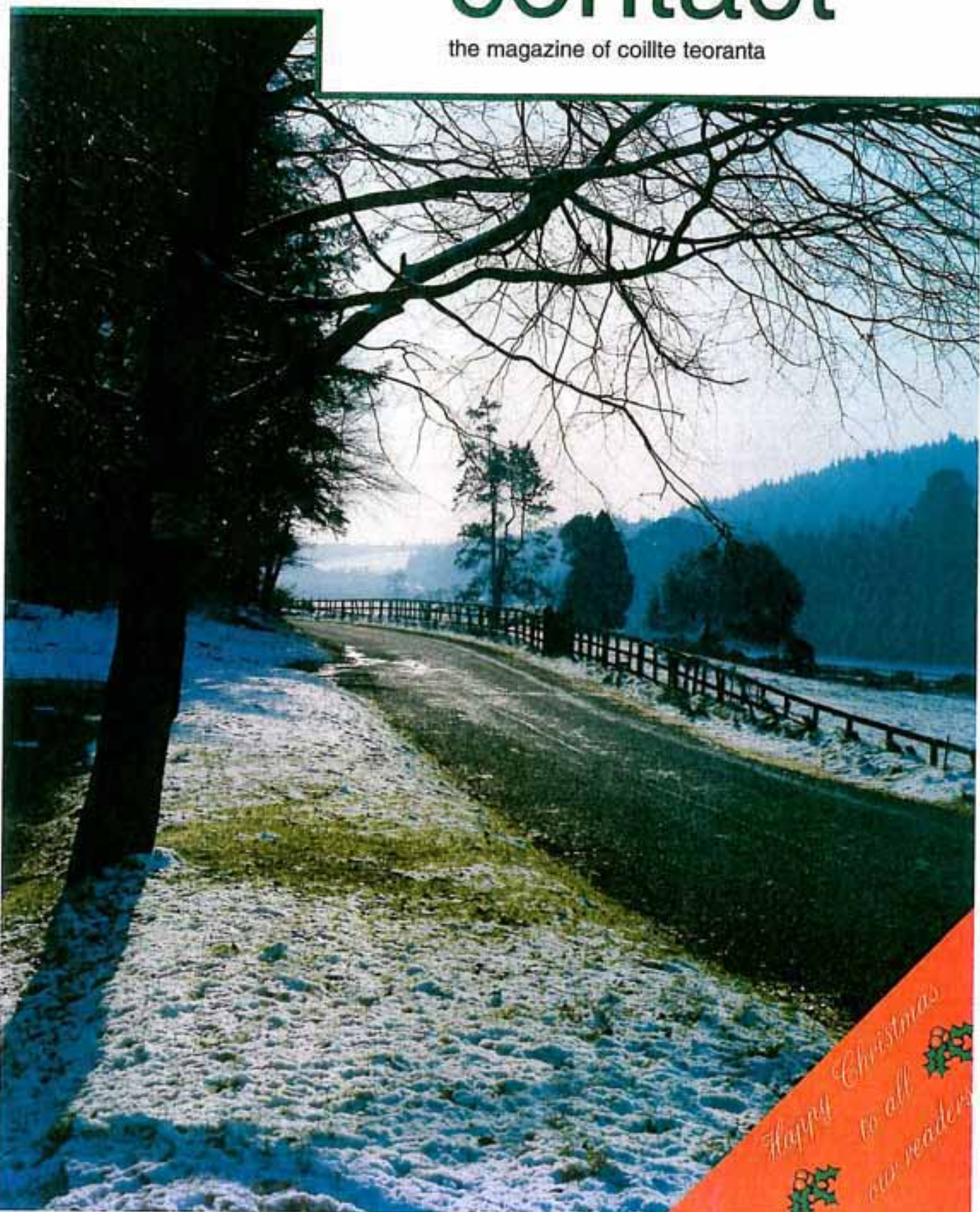
Contact: Kevin Donnellan - Project Manager; Tel: 090 974168
E-mail: kevin.donnellan@coillte.ie; Caroline White - Public Relations/Administration Manager; Tel: 071 9162663;
E-mail: caroline.white@coillte.ie

coillte contact

Cardine White

volume 16, number 4, 2004

the magazine of coillte teoranta



*Happy Christmas
to all
our readers*

LIFE Goes On

Coillte Contact readers will be glad to know that the European Commission has recently approved a second major habitat restoration project submitted by Coillte under the EU LIFE-Nature Programme for the promotion of nature conservation. The project "Restoring Raised Bog in Ireland" (LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121) will focus on the restoration and conservation of over 570 hectares of raised bog in Coillte's ownership. This new raised bog project will complement Coillte's existing blanket bog project (LIFE02 NAT/IRL/8490), which is now at the half way stage of implementation. The new project, concentrated on 14 sites in the midlands, began officially on 1st October of this year, and will run for four years until September 2008. This is another major achievement in securing funding from a programme whose application procedures are exceptionally complex and demanding, and is also a reflection of the excellent work that has been done to date by all concerned in implementing the existing blanket bog project. This application was prepared and guided through the evaluation/revision process by Pat Doolan and Philip Murphy, with particularly valuable contributions from Jim Ryan, Ronan Whelan, Val Swan, Niall Harmey (all National Parks and Wildlife Service), John Conaghan (contract ecologist), Pat Brady, Angela Wallace, Marie Mannion, Tony Curran, John Tarmey, Frank Donlon, Richard Jack, P.J. Fitzpatrick, Gerry Gavin, John Prior, Aileen O'Sullivan, Mary O'Brien and John Flanagan. Preparatory work began in late 2002 building up to submission of the application in September 2003, followed by the steering of the project application through a rigorous evaluation process culminating in formal project approval by the European Commission in July 2004.

The peatlands of the Irish midlands are among the most important raised bog systems remaining in Europe. It is estimated that Ireland contains 50% of the intact oceanic raised bog systems remaining in Europe. Raised bog habitat was once extensive over the midlands and mid-west of Ireland, covering an estimated 310,000 ha,

but today it is estimated that a mere 18,000 ha of raised bog habitat of conservation value remain. Most of the loss of raised bog habitat has been a result of harvesting of peat for household fuel, electricity production and the manufacture of horticultural products. Afforestation of raised bogs has also resulted in habitat loss, but on a much smaller scale – it is estimated that about 2% of the original total area of Irish raised bogs has been afforested. Most of the afforested areas of raised bogs are currently within Coillte's ownership.

Since 1997, 10,290 ha of "high" raised bog has been proposed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (formerly Dúchas The Heritage Service) for designation in candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) under the EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC). Many of these cSACs include areas of cutover bog which typically surround the intact bog cores and act as a buffer between the intact bog and surrounding farmland. This project focuses on forestry plantations which were included within these cSACs because they continue to impact on the raised bog habitat. In line with national and EU efforts to conserve raised bog habitat, Coillte will undertake actions aimed at restoring active raised bog habitat on 14 sites in Coillte ownership that have been

partially or wholly afforested. The 14 project sites cover 571.2 ha within 14 candidate SACs spread over counties Cavan, Galway, Laois, Longford, Meath, Roscommon and Westmeath as outlined in the attached table.

Two of the project sites (Cloonshanville Bog, Co. Roscommon and Carn Park Bog, Co. Westmeath) have been selected as project Demonstration Sites; these will be the focus of a public awareness programme over the four-year period of the project.

The project will address the main ecological threats which affect raised bog habitats through the following actions:

- Removal of 450 ha of plantation forest;
- Blocking forestry drains in order to elevate water levels and hence restore the hydrological balance of the peatland areas;
- Removal of naturally regenerated trees from adjacent areas of open, unplanted bogs;
- Perimeter protection of vulnerable raised bog sites against fire; and
- Consultations to secure control of turbary (turf-cutting) rights.

In addition to restoring active raised bog habitat in previously afforested/drained areas, it is also expected that restoration works will have a positive effect on adjoining



Raised bog project staff visit the blanket bog project site at Bellaveeny, Co. Mayo on 1st October. Pictured are (left to right) John Tarmey, Frank Donlon, Seamus O'Connor, Pat Brady, John Derwin, Angela Wallace, John Conaghan, Caroline White, Kevin Donnellan, Denis Lenihan and Pat Doolan.

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The Sligo Champion

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Sligo students among the awards in online quiz

THE FIRST national Graduate online information quiz has just ended. The online quiz which is funded by various Government agencies aims to encourage students to research information about politics, environment, European affairs, health & safety, music, sport, careers, travel etc. The project is supported by a prize fund of up to 100,000 and is being promoted weekly by RTE 2fm.

Each week throughout the school year students are given access to questions which are provided by various Government bodies on the Graduate website www.graduate.ie

Students are then directed to the websites of the sponsoring bodies to research the answers to the various questions, they then submit their answers online. Every week at least six prize winners are selected from all the students who have correctly answered the questions. Prizes include free trips to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, 500 cash prizes, iPods and DELL IT equipment for schools.

The project has proven to be hugely popular with both students and teachers and has attracted a registration of almost 27,000 students. Funding for next school year's competition has already been committed and it will recommence next September.

The following organisations have provided funding for this year's competition: Ireland's Presidency of the EU, European Parliament Office in Ireland, European Commission, Foras na Gaeilge, Office of the Ombudsman, Mayo Co. Council, Data Protection Office, Oasis (Citizens information service), Coillte (Blanket bog restoration project), B.M.W. Regional Assembly, Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly, Irish Water Safety, Combat Poverty, RTE 2fm, DELL.

Missing from the photograph is student Ciara Cunningham, Ursuline College, Sligo who won 500 cash prize which was sponsored by Oasis the Citizens Information Service.



Student Jane O'Hara, Ursuline College, Sligo receiving voucher for DELL IT equipment which she won for her school from Ms Caroline White, representing a jointly funded Nature Conservation Project between Coillte and EU DG - Environment. This project focuses on restoring active blanket bog in Ireland. Jane also won a free trip to the European Parliament in Strasbourg which was sponsored by the European Parliament's Dublin office.



Student Zita Casserly, Ursuline College, Sligo receiving voucher for DELL IT equipment from Mr. Gerry Lavelle, B.M.W. Regional Assembly (sponsor) which Zita won for her school. Zita also won a free trip to the European Parliament in Strasbourg which was sponsored by the European Parliament's Dublin office.

Irish Independent

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IN BRIEF

Five held, drugs seized in raid

GARDAI raided eight premises yesterday as they stepped up their battle against a city's organised crime racket.

Four men and one woman were taken into custody and more searches and further arrests are expected in the coming days in Limerick. A key focus of the investigation is the probe into the gangland murder of Michael McNamara on October 20. Cocaine and cannabis with a street value of up to €15,000 were also seized in one of the raids.

Bog restoration project unveiled

THE largest bog restoration project in Ireland was unveiled by Agriculture Minister Joe Walsh yesterday.

Forestry body Collte have been working on the €4.2m project in Eskeragh, Co Mayo, since 2002, restoring 14 bogland sites, most of them in the west.

€2m renal unit

A 25-YEAR long campaign for a new renal dialysis unit at Sligo General Hospital ended yesterday with the go ahead for a €2m unit which will begin construction next month.



Dragonfly thrive due to global warming



Amateur life

Michael Viney

First Ireland's orchids, now the dragonflies - this is a summer for sumptuous books about wildlife. Last month I was crooning over Ireland's *Wild Orchids*, a botanist's and bibliophile's bliss of paintings and text and a 700-copy collectors' item priced at €245. Quite as lavish and lovely in its own way, but costing a mere fraction, is *The Natural History of Ireland's Dragonflies*, the first book of its kind. Bursting with exquisite photographs of the insects and their watery landscapes, it weighs almost three glossy kilos.

The four-year Dragonfly Ireland project was a ground-breaking co-operation between the nature conservation agencies North and South, using amateur volunteers along with professional scientists. As a joint ministerial foreword acknowledges, the island-wide survey and the book it has produced "have brought biological recording to a new level in Ireland" - even, perhaps, in Europe. It's not merely about the 35 species now on the Irish dragonfly list, but also the wetlands on which they - and so much more of the island's wildlife - depend. These vary wonderfully, from lushly vegetated pools in the bogs and secluded limestone lakes, to coastal lagoons and even pools in quarries.

At one marshy, limy wetland in east Co Mayo, never checked for dragonflies before, 10 species were seen in just two hours on a warm day in July. Among them were amber-winged and moorland hawkers, black-tailed skimmer and ruddy darter - names that trip off the tongue a lot more easily than the Latin, and also paint helpful pictures in the mind. One of the book's big surprises is the decision by its authors - Brian Nelson and Robert Thompson - to use new vernacular names for many of the Odonata species. The old country coinage for dragonflies, "devil's darnin' needle", snáthaid an diabhall, encouraged the myth that they sting or bite people and also a popular indifference to their intricate, jewel-bright variation and different sorts of behaviour.

The process of framing common names had already gone some of the way. In Ireland

in the last century, the remarkable Cynthia Longfield (sometimes known as Madame Dragonfly from a lifetime devoted to their study) devised a rather cumbersome selection that didn't really catch on. Then, in the 1970s, dragonflies were divided into hawkers, skimmers and darters, from their different habits of hunting, and that helped provide a vernacular basis. But damselflies, their small, slender relations in the Odonata, were still left with "damselfly" at the end of their names.

Birds and butterflies don't need such labels, Nelson and Thompson argue, so why should the damselflies? Now, emerald damselfly, red-eyed damselfly and blue-tailed damselfly have become common spreadwing, large reedeye and common bluetip, and it's up to the naturalists and the school fieldtrips to bring the new names into use. The stunning quality of Robert Thompson's photographs, and his chapter on camera techniques and fieldcraft, could also encourage a new realm of popular interest.

The dragonfly star of the book flew into Ireland in the first summer of the survey, complete with a resonant name in Latin and English. *Anax imperator*, the blue emperor, is a big, powerful, unmissable creature, flashing like a kingfisher as it dominates a whole pond or stretch of lakeshore. Since it arrived in 2000, spotted first by bird-watchers on the Wexford coast, it has rapidly bred to become a common species in the southern and eastern coastal counties - one of several dragonflies encouraged by global warming to colonise Ireland. Other flamboyant species, among chasers and spiketails, earn their pages from rare past records in Ireland and a good chance of return.

The book's habitat gallery shows 58 wetland sites and talks about the species found there. Many are on or around the bogs, which gives extra value to Coillte's bog restoration programme, jointly funded with Europe since 2002, and given ministerial blessing this month at a demonstration site near Crossmolina, Co Mayo.

Forestry and peat-cutting have drained, cloaked or shredded huge amounts of the west's blanket bog, but some in Coillte's charge can be restored by blocking drains, taking out

Graduate online quiz winners receive their prizes

THE FIRST national Graduate online information quiz has just ended. The online quiz which is funded by various Government agencies aims to encourage students to research information about politics, environment, European affairs, health & safety, music, sport, careers, travel etc.

The project is supported by a prize fund of up to €100,000 and is being promoted weekly by RTE 2fm.

Each week throughout the school year students are given access to questions which are provided by various Government bodies on the Graduate website www.graduate.ie. Students are then directed to the websites of the sponsoring bodies to research the answers to the various questions, they then submit their answers online.

Every week at least six prize winners are selected from all the students who have correctly answered the questions. Prizes include free trips to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, €500 cash prizes, iPods and DELL IT equipment for schools.

The project has proven to be hugely popular with both students and teachers and has attracted a registration of almost 27,000 students.

Funding for next school year's competition has already been committed and it will recommence next September.

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Student David Egan, St. Colman's College, Claremorris, receiving voucher for DELL IT equipment from Mr. David Simpson, The Graduate, on behalf of Mayo Co. Council (sponsor). David also won a free trip to the European Parliament in Strasbourg which was sponsored by the European Parliament's Dublin office.



Student Ross Mellor, St. Joseph's N.S., Shrule, receiving his €500 cash prize from his Caroline White, representing a jointly funded Nature Conservation Project between Coillte and EU DG - Environment. This project focuses on restoring active blanket bog in Ireland.



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THURSDAY, JULY 8, 2004

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Bringing our ailing bogs back to life

There has been considerable success so far in a bog restoration project that aims to revive 1,200 hectares of western blanket bog, writes Dick Ahlstrom

New boglands are being created from old in an innovative restoration project being run by Coillte. The €4.2-million project seeks to bring 14 bogland sites back to life and renew them as places for bog plants and wildlife.

tial water, and the stripping away of the growing bog cover.

Coillte's habitat restoration project is co-funded with support from the EU's Life-Nature initiative, an effort to conserve Europe's flora and fauna. It involves about 1,200 hectares of blanket



the EU to initiate a restoration scheme for suitable blanket boglands as part of

The theory is that if you raise the

Next, drains were blocked to water to build up once again and

LETTERS FARMING GAA PROPERTY TRAVEL

Woods well worth a visit to relax and savour

04 October 2004

Donal Hickey recommends a walk in the park.

Coillte is encouraging people to visit its 11 forest parks and 150 amenity areas where there are facilities such as car parking, picnic tables and nature trails. It is reckoned that around eight million people enjoy our forests each year, ranking forests among the most visited areas in the entire country. Coillte has an open forest policy - another means of satisfying the ever-growing demand for outdoor recreation.

Up to 15% of Coillte property is earmarked for nature conservation and 1,000 hectares of blanket bog habitat are being restored.

Bog is a thorny issue when it comes to tree-planting and large amounts of virgin bogland have been planted during the past 20 years, much to the annoyance of peatland conservationists who have been striving to retain what little blanket bog remains.

But the message now seems to be getting home, belatedly in many cases. People might wonder how you can restore bogland, something that took millenia to create in the first place. Cloosh Valley, in Connemara, is the largest continuous forest in Ireland and is the focus of a forest management plan.

Portions of Cloosh forest have been identified as having the potential to be restored to blanket bog habitat. These portions are very wet in any case and still have bog vegetation. The idea is to recreate good quality blanket bog through felling existing conifers and not replanting. It is also planned to retain all areas of unplanted blanket bog at Cloosh.

In total, the EU has approved funding for bog restoration on 14 sites, mostly in the north, north-west and midlands. By the end of last year, work had commenced on these sites. Trees felled were either left to decompose naturally, removed for sale commercially, or chipped on site. Drains were also blocked and fencing put up to control areas overgrazed.

Signs of recovery are already being reported on a number of sites, evidenced by the return of bog plants. Five bog sites have also been developed for educational purposes and will have public information and access facilities such as boardwalks. The first boardwalk has been completed on the Slieve Bloom site and others are planned for parts of Mayo, Galway and Donegal.

As the country's largest landowner, with over 6% of the land in its possession, Coillte sees itself as having a key role to play in nature conservation. An interesting project surrounds the protection of the lesser horseshoe bat, one of the rarest of nine bat species in Ireland. It needs forest and woodland habitat to survive because it has a weak navigation system - it requires objects like trees and hedgerows to find its way around and hunt for food.

Our population of the lesser horseshoe is found mainly in Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Clare, Galway and Mayo, all areas where forests are important foraging areas for the species. Coillte has often come under fire for its use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers. It says it only applies pesticides where it is absolutely essential and is striving to further reduce usage. It maintains it uses less than 1% of pesticides put on land nationally and reports a significant reduction since 1997. Guidelines for staff include spraying a minimum distance of between 10 and 25 metres away from rivers and other watercourses and spraying in minimal wind conditions. Coillte is also adamant that fertilisers are only spread where the natural fertility of the land is not capable of maintaining a productive forest. It also says the amount of fertiliser used fell by 12% in the 2002/'03 period.

Over-planting of tree species, such as non-native conifers, is another sore point. For instance, sitka spruce which now covers more than half of the company's forest areas. Many people argue that not enough broadleaf trees, such as beech, oak and birch, are being planted. However, the