

Networking Community Collaboration  
for Environmental Stewardship  
(NCCES)

# Final Report

Project ID: 23SICSF009



**IDP** Inishowen  
Development  
Partnership

 **RAPID**  
Rural Area Partnership Incorporated

## **Introduction**

The NCCES project enabled groups from Inishowen and the Derry/Strabane areas to come together to learn more about biodiversity and share skills and experiences. A number of workshops were organised and groups from both sides of the border were invited to attend. in order to build appreciation and knowledge of nature and biodiversity within the Derry, Strabane and Donegal communities.

The active components of the project were delivered by 3 external organisations:

- Butterlope Farm, based in Co. Derry, Northern Ireland;
- Inishowen Rivers Trust, based in Inishowen, Co. Donegal;
- Adam Rory Porter, based in Buncrana, Co. Donegal.

### **Butterlope Farm**

Butterlope Farm CIC is a social enterprise based in the Sperrins area of Derry and Strabane District Council. Programmes and services are delivered on and off the farm aiming to bring people closer to nature while learning about the landscape, wildlife and farming and improving participants' health and well-being. Butterlope Farm delivered 3 of the 6 workshops as well as the LANTRA training.

### **Inishowen Rivers Trust**

Inishowen Rivers Trust is an eNGO based on the Inishowen Peninsula with the aim of protecting and restoring the waterbodies within the Inishowen Municipal District and connecting communities to nature through educational workshops and volunteer activities. Inishowen Rivers Trust were invited to deliver 2 workshops for the NCCES project and facilitate the Citizen Assembly, the final event of the project.

### **Adam Rory Porter**

Adam Rory Porter is a fine art landscape photographer and fine art print maker based in Inishowen. He has extensive experience with all types of camera equipment and was invited to facilitate the workshop on photographing wildlife.

This report summarises each of the activities carried out as part of this project.

## Workshops

A total of six workshops were arranged as part of the NCCES project. A brief synopsis of each workshop is provided below.

### Workshop - Protecting our threatened wildlife

Venue:	IDP Offices, Pound Street, Carndonagh	Date:	30/11/2024
Facilitator:	Trish Murphy, Inishowen Rivers Trust	No. in Attendance:	13

The first workshop in the series brought together the various groups some of which were meeting for the first time. The workshop was an exploration of the topic of biodiversity decline in Ireland and the importance of understanding the status of local biodiversity. The groups discussed how to find out more about local species and habitats and the different organisations involved on both sides of the border. The key species and habitats there are at risk were discussed and the group created a list based on their current knowledge. Following on from this the group discussed what is needed locally to help to protect species and generated the following list.

- Planning – Planning departments should be provided with additional training on biodiversity and climate change considerations.
- Roads – Council road staff (supervisors and ground staff) should receive regular training on best practice in road maintenance with due consideration for biodiversity and water.
- Education – Educational programmes should continue to be rolled out to schools, local groups can help to spread awareness through media appearances and visits to other community groups.
- Tie into existing programmes – More experienced groups could contribute to existing projects and add an environmental aspect ensuring they are aligned with biodiversity, water and climate goals.
- Biodiversity & Farming Centre – The creation of a shared space to promote the overlap between biodiversity and farming.
- Citizenship programmes – Promote participation in citizen sciences initiatives and projects that promote biodiversity, sustainability and an increased awareness of nature restoration.
- Reduction in the use of pesticides – Raising awareness of the harmful impact of pesticide use and providing alternative solutions to councils, farmers and the general public.
- Shared communication channels – Promoting environmental topics in mainstream media channels to promote an understanding of key issues and overlapping challenges of the biodiversity, climate and water quality crises.
- Action – Promoting action amongst groups, the general public and local businesses. See sponsorship from local businesses to promote themes and issues.

In relation to the citizenship programmes, the group discussed the wide range of citizen science surveys open to the public on both sides of the border. An intended outcome of this project was to contribute to our knowledge of local species by developing a citizen science initiative to



monitor and preserve the natural environment and biodiversity present across the participating border regions. The group agreed that there are already a number of excellent initiatives running that all participants could engage in. The group agreed to look at developing a short guide to recording biodiversity that could be shared with other groups locally. This would help to raise awareness of what is available and encourage others to learn more and contribute to the protection of wildlife.



### Workshop - Peatlands and Water

<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Meenletterbale Peatland and Carrowmenagh Community Centre</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>22/02/2025</b>
<b>Facilitator:</b>	<b>Trish Murphy and John Doherty, Inishowen Rivers Trust</b>	<b>No. in Attendance:</b>	<b>13</b>

Participants were invited to visit a peatland restoration site in North Inishowen to discuss the importance of peatlands and their role in the filtering and storage of water. Participants gathered at the Carrowmenagh Community Centre and were bused to the nearby peatland. There they were taken on a short tour of the site to discuss the features and characteristics of the peatland and their important ecological and climate role.

The site, owned by the land trust Green Sod Ireland, has undergone a wide range of studies and is currently being monitored for biodiversity, rainfall and water table level. Monitoring wells have been installed at a number of points on the site and gauges set up in each well. These monitor the level of the water table and the data gathered can identify the direction of movement of the water in the peatland and monitor how it fluctuates over the different seasons. Peatlands filter

and hold water in the landscape and are an important part of the recharge to groundwater. Sphagnum moss, the bog builder of Irish bogs, can hold significant quantities of water releasing it gradually into the surrounding landscape. Degraded bogs release sediment and ammonia and emit greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane. The importance of reducing the amount of bare peat and drainage on peatlands was discussed and their important role in climate change mitigation.

A full Restoration Action Plan for the site was developed by the Inishowen Rivers Trust and the monitoring is ongoing with the University of Galway. The Trust staff provided examples of the data collected from the site and what type of restoration actions were planned. The role of the farming community in peatland restoration was highlighted by the Trust's agricultural staff and discussed vegetation control of *Molinia* and regeneration of heather and Sphagnum. Following the site visit the group returned to the local community centre to discuss the site over refreshments.

For many of the participants this was their first visit to a peatland site undergoing restoration.



## Workshop - Bird Surveys and Wetland Bird Identification

<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Online and Inch Wildfowl Reserve, Burt, Co. Donegal</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>17 &amp; 18/01/2025</b>
<b>Facilitator:</b>	<b>Annie Mullan and Rachel Bain, Butterlope Farm</b>	<b>No. in Attendance:</b>	<b>18</b>

Bird surveys, and in particular wetland birds, are a long established and effective citizen science success story. Volunteer bird surveys are an important tool for scientists to gather an extensive range of data. With this workshop we wished to build the learners' confidence in wetland bird identification and signpost them to citizen science initiatives in their areas.

Inch Wildfowl Reserve on Inch Island, Inishowen is home to thousands of wintering wildfowl so it was the obvious choice for the workshop venue. It has an 8km of path around the lake and 4 bird hides with interpretation panels. There was no inside lecture space so it was felt that an introductory zoom session on the evening before the visit would be beneficial to all.

This zoom session covered the following topics:

- Why we should learn to ID wetland birds;
- Waders ID Characteristics;
- Ducks ID Characteristics;
- Swans, geese, ID including resident and winter visitors;
- Other common species;
- Introduction to Citizen Science surveys e.g. WeBS and I-WeBS;
- Resource and website links.

The visit to Inch Wildfowl Reserve involved the following:

- Introduction and history of the reserve;
- How to use telescopes and binoculars effectively;
- Using ID books and ID charts;
- Observation of wildfowl and other wildlife e.g. interactions between White Tailed Sea Eagle and otters;
- Provision of resource pack that included zoom presentation, links to organisations and ID charts.



### Feedback

This workshop was well attended and learners were very positive about the experience they had. Many had not visited the reserve before despite it being on ‘their doorstep.’ They appreciated the resources provided which meant they could continue learning after the workshop. Comments made regarding the workshop included:

*Very enjoyable morning birding with the bonus of seeing both eagles that have taken up residence*

*Was great fun especially seeing the two white tailed eagles*

*I am looking for experience of surveys so I will definitely sign up to the WeBS initiative*

### Workshop - Gardening with Wildlife

Venue:	Butterlope Farm, Plumbridge, Co. Tyrone	Date:	03/05/2025
Facilitator:	Annie Mullan and Rachel Bain, Butterlope Farm	No. in Attendance:	10

There are many ways to improve traditional gardens or neglected spaces for wildlife. This workshop aimed to be open for all to learn how to improve areas for wildlife from small patios or balconies to small and large gardens in both rural and urban settings. The morning was spent in the farm garden, polytunnel and exploring the hedgerows. Hedgerows on the farm are both well established and newly planted native hedgerows. The workshop covered the following topics:

- Don't Mow Let it Grow (with the biodiversity officer who first implemented this policy with a local council);
- Planting for pollinators;
- How to plant and maintain a native species hedgerow;
- Organic Vegetable growing - Growing your own vegetables is a great way to bring down your carbon footprint as well as providing space for wildlife.



Learners also enjoyed a lunch made from the produce from the kitchen garden and plants foraged from the hedgerows on the farm.



### Feedback

The workshop which took place on a sunny Spring morning was well received. There were good discussions between the group members on how they garden for wildlife and grow vegetables. Participants especially enjoyed tasting the vegetables recently picked from the garden and the foraged soup and desserts. They all felt that the difference in taste between shop bought vegetables and home grown is huge and is the best motivation for growing your own. Comments made regarding the workshop included:

*I never knew you could use nettles and comfrey as free fertiliser, I am going to try that!*

*Enjoyable morning - especially the lunch - thank you*

### Workshops - Woodland and Garden Birds

Venue:	Faughan Woods, Claudy, Co. Derry	Date:	17/05/2025
Facilitator:	Annie Mullan and Rachel Bain, Butterlope Farm	No. in Attendance:	12

Building on the previous wetland bird identification workshop, this session focused on woodland and garden birds. These different habitats require different skills, equipment and knowledge. These birds are also a focus of many citizen science projects and they are birds that would also be found in garden which make them more accessible for volunteers to record. Faughan Woodlands which is owned and managed by the Woodland Trust was chosen as it is close to RAPID offices and offers a variety of woodlands of different ages which leads to a great variety in bird life. It is also fully accessible with an excellent network of paths, seating, sculptures and car parks. The workshop covered topics:



- Bird Identification equipment and resources, including bird song ID App;
- Interesting facts and folklore of our common woodland/garden birds;
- Citizen Science Apps and initiatives in each area;
- Use of flight, silhouettes, size, colour and bird song in identification.

Lunch was provided at RAPID offices following the site visits.



## Feedback

A number of the participants on the course are also volunteer Woodland Trust wardens so they were very knowledgeable and proud of the woodlands we were visiting. This enhanced the course and provoked discussion over volunteering and what they were able to achieve for wildlife through their work. Participants thoroughly enjoyed the beautiful scenery, woodlands and Faughan River. Many spotted birds they had never seen before such as dippers, blackcap and goldcrest. Comments made regarding the workshop included:

*I love the Merlin App, I will be using that to help me in the future.*

*I must make more of an effort to do the Big Garden Birdwatch.*

*Thank you for all the resources, so useful!*

## Workshop – Using your Smartphone to Photograph Wildlife

Venue:	Fort Dunree, Inishowen, Co. Donegal	Date:	26/04/2025
Facilitator:	Adam Rory Porter	No. in Attendance:	11

Landscape photographer, Adam Rory Porter, led the participants through steps to getting the most out of their mobile phones for animal and habitat photography. Often a photograph is very valuable evidence of an animal or plant sighting and being able to add these to a record submission greatly increases the value of the sighting. From Dunree there was ample opportunity to photograph the different habitats, birds at sea and other creatures. Adam described suitable equipment that might enhance the photography and shared his top 10 tips.

### Get close, but not too close

- Wildlife is best captured when you're near enough to show detail, but not so close you disturb or scare the animal. Use patience and slow movements.

### Use the zoom sparingly

- Digital zoom can ruin image quality fast. If your phone has a telephoto lens, use that instead. Otherwise, crop later—it's usually better than zooming in.

### Tap to focus

- Always tap on the animal (or its eye) on your screen. This tells your phone exactly what to focus on and helps expose correctly.

### Hold steady

- A slight shake ruins detail. Use both hands, a tripod, or even lean against a tree or rock. And breathe steadily when tapping the shutter.

### Shoot in burst mode

- Animals move fast. Use burst mode (hold the shutter button) to take a rapid series of shots—you're more likely to catch the perfect moment.

### Use natural light

- Early morning or late afternoon light (the "golden hours") is softer and more flattering. Avoid flash—it startles wildlife and usually looks terrible.

### Stay quiet and patient

- Good wildlife shots often come to those who wait. Stay still, let nature settle around you, and be ready when the moment comes.

### Use grid lines for better composition

- Turn on your phone's grid to help with the rule of thirds. Placing the animal off-center usually creates a more dynamic image.



### **Edit gently**

- Use editing apps to boost contrast or sharpness, but don't overdo it. Keep it natural and true to the moment.

### **Respect the wildlife**

- No photo is worth stressing or harming an animal. Keep your distance, don't chase, and remember—you're a guest in their world.

Some wonderful photos were captured by the participants during this workshop.



## Lantra Customised Award Training on Environmental Stewardship

<b>Venue:</b>	<b>IDP Offices and Butterlope Farm</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>June 2025</b>
<b>Facilitator:</b>	<b>Annie Mullan and Rachel Bain, Butterlope Farm</b>	<b>No. in Attendance:</b>	<b>10</b>

Butterlope Farm have previously worked with RAPID delivering LANTRA qualifications and training courses and as such we have LANTRA Approved trainers. RAPID is a registered LANTRA Training Centre. Within this project we developed and attained accreditation for a new 1 day, 'Environmental Stewardship Course'. Butterlope Farm was responsible for all resource development and registration of the course and the subsequent learners. Initially it was planned to deliver this training to 6 people but as the interest was high 10 learners attended at least one of the days and 9 learners attended both days and achieved the award.

This course aimed to provide learners with further skills to complete the future monitoring and nature preservation goals of the citizen network as well as having a deeper understanding and knowledge of what environmental stewardship means. The course is an unassessed LANTRA customised training course with a LANTRA and RAPID certificate of attendance awarded to attendees. The course required 6.5 learning hours and this was delivered over two Saturdays in June at RAPID offices and Butterlope Farm.

<b>Learning outcomes</b>	<b>Topics covered</b>
1. Understand how to identify native and non-native trees.	<p>Features of trees used for identification.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaves/Needles</li> <li>• Buds</li> <li>• Bark</li> <li>• Form</li> <li>• Deciduous/Evergreen</li> </ul> <p>Native and non-native species.</p> <p>Trees in Irish Mythology.</p>
2. Become aware of the importance of hedgerows for wildlife.	<p>History and biodiversity of hedgerows.</p> <p>Plants useful for foraging.</p> <p>Make up of hedgerows in local area.</p> <p>Use of hedgerows for farming.</p> <p>Threats facing hedgerows i.e. disease, habitat loss, climate change.</p>



Learning outcomes	Topics covered
3. Understand the threats to local bat and/or bird species.	<p>Irish bat species and their distribution.</p> <p>How to identify bats in the field using bat detectors and behaviour.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Introduction to wetland or woodland birds.</p> <p>How to identify birds in the field using telescopes, binoculars and digital apps.</p>
4. Understand their individual or community group carbon footprint.	<p>What is climate change and the causes.</p> <p>How to measure individual and/or community group carbon footprint including digital footprints, transport, buildings, lifestyles.</p>
5. Identify methods to reduce their own or community group's carbon footprint.	<p>Actions that can be taken to reduce individual and/or community group carbon footprint.</p>
6. Have knowledge of citizen science initiatives and how to access these.	<p>Introduction to citizen science initiatives locally in Derry and Donegal and to national initiatives such as:</p> <p>Shared Island Project initiatives</p> <p>All Ireland Daubenton's Bat Survey</p> <p>WeBS – Wetland Bird Surveys</p> <p>Big Garden Bird Survey</p> <p>River Monitoring Initiatives</p>



The 9 learners who achieved the course were awarded their certificates at the Cross-Border Environmental Citizen Assembly in the IOSAS Centre & Celtic Prayer Garden on 20th September 2025.



## Citizen Assembly

Venue:	IOSAS Centre, Muff, Inishowen, Co. Donegal	Date:	20/09/2025
Facilitator:	Trish Murphy and Micheala Gallagher, Inishowen Rivers Trust	No. in Attendance:	44

The final event in the NCCES project was a Citizen Assembly bringing together participants from the workshops, other interested groups and members of the public. The event was held in the IOSAS Centre and involved a networking lunch, presentations from the local authority Biodiversity Officers and Coastwatch. These were followed by a World Café style event and facilitated discussion exploring the potential for collaboration amongst environmental groups in the North West to improve our understanding of local biodiversity and protect nature. The LANTRA certificates were also presented to the participants and the final part of the day was a walk through the Celtic Prayer Garden at the centre by Brendan Farren of Big Green Art. A full report on the outcome of the facilitated discussion is provided in a separate report and includes recommendations for future activities.



**Citizen Assembly North West**

# EXPLORING ENVIRONMENTAL COLLABORATION IN NORTH WEST IRELAND

**COLLABORATING FOR NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY IN THE BORDER REGIONS OF DERRY & STRABANE AND DONEGAL**

We now cordially invite anyone with an interest in wildlife to join in the discussion of how an environmental network for the North West could be facilitated and who needs to be involved.

**20th September 2025**  
**12:00pm – 4:00pm**  
**iosas Centre, White Oaks, Derryvane, Muff, Inishowen F93 F104**

**CLICK HERE FOR:** [Event details & Ticket Booking](#) **OR RING** **ANNE - 0749373083**

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## Recommendations

The outcomes of the NCCES project demonstrated the importance of education and increasing skills and knowledge among local groups to help understand, protect and restore local biodiversity. The full programme of events helped to create new relationships between individuals and groups, enhance the quality of partnerships amongst the participants and discuss actions for environmental peacebuilding. There is still much work to be achieved to safeguard our environment and the following recommendations are made as potential future actions:

1. Continue to provide educational opportunities on biodiversity, habitats and monitoring skills;
2. Build a network of suitable demonstration areas that can be used as training venues on both sides of the border;
3. Develop further certified training that could be used as a pathway to job creation and improved career opportunities;
4. Promote further engagement with local authorities and national eNGOs to promote further engagement in citizen science projects;
5. Provide opportunities for further discussion and engagement with interested parties from both sides of the border;
6. Promote the development of an environmental network for the North West (see separate report and recommendations on Citizen Assembly).

Funding to deliver the recommendations above should be sought and could be facilitated by the participating partners in this project. This funding could facilitate training, promotion, collaborations and also support smaller groups to engage in future work.



*Participants pictured at the Citizen Assembly on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2025.*



# Acknowledgements

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- Inishowen Rivers Trust (Trish Murphy, Micheala Gallagher, John Doherty)
- Adam Rory Porter
- Staff at RAPID Rural Area Partnership Derry
- Staff at Inishowen Development Partnership



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