

2014 - 2017

Illustrating the key habitats and species found within the Mid Ulster area, highlighting the increasing need to protect and value our local biodiversity resource.

Mid Ulster Cluster of Councils



Cookstown
DISTRICT COUNCIL



Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan



visit www.biodiversityni.com

Introduction

The Mid Ulster area is endowed with a rich and diverse range of landscapes and wildlife habitats that together distinguish its special character and identity. This document illustrates the key habitats and species that can be found within the Mid Ulster Council Cluster, and highlights the increasing need to protect and value our local biodiversity resource.

Throughout the Mid Ulster area, wetland habitats, including lakes, rivers and peatlands are of particular note, but grassland, woodland and hedgerows are also important. This assemblage of habitats combines to provide an important natural environment. This is recognised at a local, national and international level by the significant number of designated sites within Mid Ulster, including: Ramsar sites; Special Protection Areas; Special Areas of Conservation; Areas of Special Scientific Interest; Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

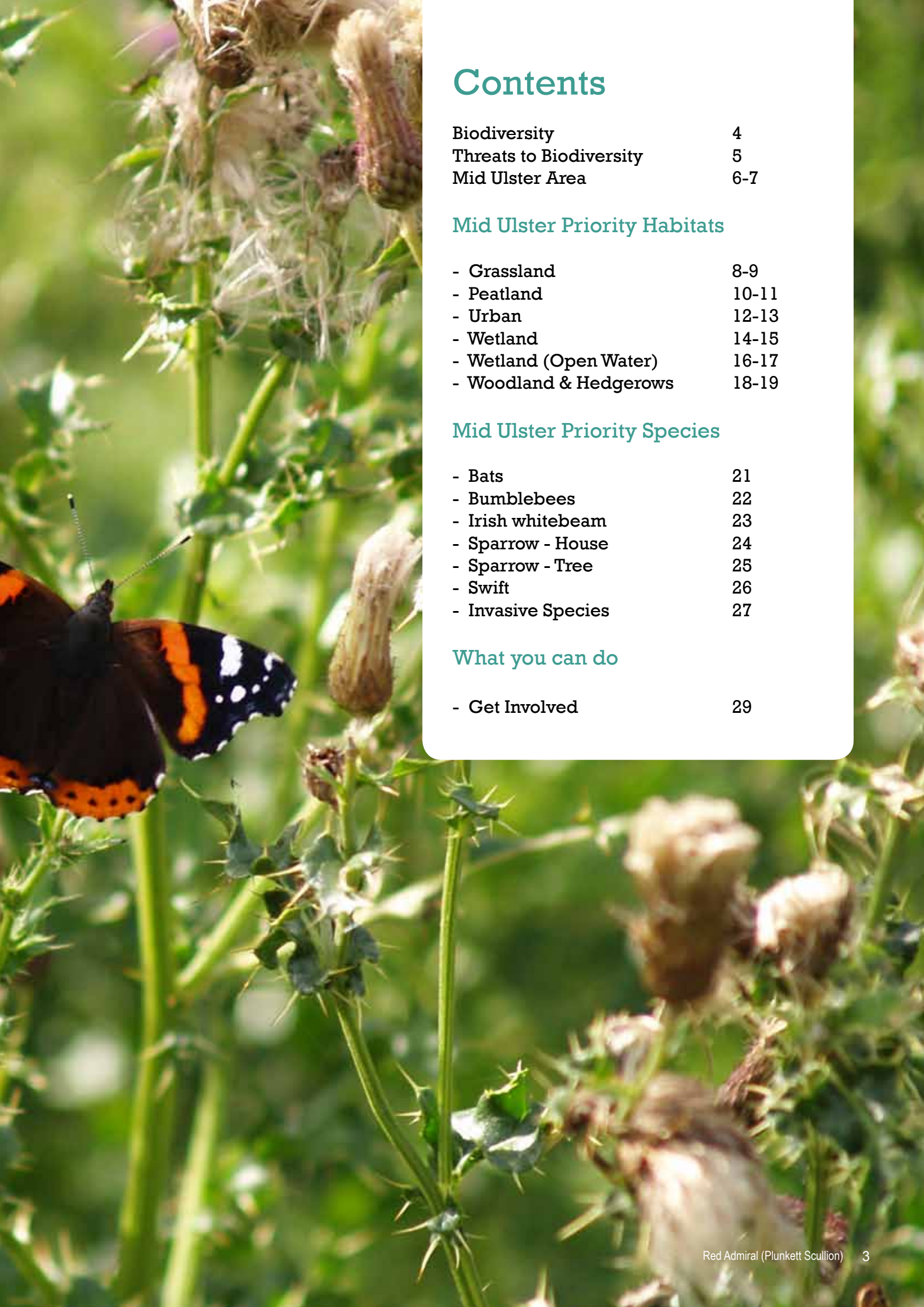
An audit was conducted to identify the biodiversity resource of the Mid Ulster area. This brought together the best available information on the state of our local biodiversity, with a particular focus on Northern Ireland Priority Habitats and Northern Ireland Priority Species. These are the habitats and species that are known to be in decline in Northern Ireland and in most need of conservation action if they are to remain part of our local biodiversity.

An assessment was made of these habitats and species for selection as Local Priority Habitats and Local Priority Species for which conservation action will be taken. In addition to the benefits to a wide range of species from actions undertaken through the Habitat Action Plans, some species have been selected as Local Priority Species for specific conservation action.

It is the implementation of these plans that will help towards ensuring the biodiversity of Mid Ulster is maintained and enhanced. Many of these projects will feed into the Northern Ireland Action Plans, demonstrating that local action does make a real contribution at a national level.

“The Mid Ulster area is endowed with a rich and diverse range of landscapes and wildlife habitats that together distinguish its special character and identity.”





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Biodiversity!

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the short term used for 'biological diversity', which is, "the total variety of all living plants and animals, and the habitats in which they live". It encompasses the entire range of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects and other invertebrates, plants, fungi and micro-organisms.

Why is biodiversity important?

Biodiversity is the web of life, of which we are an integral part, and upon which we so fully depend. It provides us with essential goods and services that we could not live without – The oxygen we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. The intrinsic value of biodiversity cannot be over-estimated, adding beauty and variety to our surroundings. The Mid Ulster area is endowed with a rich and diverse range of landscapes and wildlife habitats that together distinguish its special character and identity.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans

At the Rio de Janeiro Earth summit in 1992, the UK signed up to the Convention on Biological Diversity. In 1995 the UK Biodiversity Strategy was developed, followed by the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy in 2002. These strategies include national targets and actions for a range of important habitats and species. For these to be effective, action must be taken at a local level. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are seen as a means by which this can be achieved.

Biodiversity: It's our duty

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011 places a statutory duty on all public bodies with regard to biodiversity. "It is the duty of every public body, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions."

The Act requires public bodies to take reasonable steps to further the conservation of priority habitats and species. This will help ensure that Northern Ireland meets it's European and international commitments to work towards halting biodiversity loss. Local Biodiversity Action Plans can make a significant contribution to these obligations.





Threats to Local Biodiversity

As throughout much of Northern Ireland, and indeed worldwide, many native species and habitats are declining within the Mid Ulster area. The main causes of this decline include habitat loss, invasive alien species, and pollution. Most significant threats to our biodiversity are often caused by human activity. Fortunately this means we are in a position to adapt our behaviour to manage and enhance our natural environment to safeguard our biodiversity for future generations.

Habitat Loss

Habitat loss is the greatest threat to biodiversity worldwide. All habitats are under threat from loss, damage or fragmentation.

For example, wetlands are subject to damaging activities such as drainage, conversion or abandonment. Upland areas are under threat from over grazing and unsustainable recreation, leading to peat erosion and disturbance to ground nesting birds. Housing and commercial development can lead to habitat destruction and fragmentation. Fragmentation restricts the movement of species across our landscape, leaving them isolated and more vulnerable to extinction in the area.

Invasive Alien Species

Non-native invasive species are the second biggest threat to biodiversity after habitat loss. While the vast majority of non-native species do not cause problems, a few do. Some are deliberately released or escape from gardens or farms, while others are stowaways with imported goods.

Invasive species tend to be highly adaptable and strong competitors impacting on biodiversity through competition, herbivory, predation, alteration of habitats and food webs, introduction of parasites and pathogens and through the dilution of native gene pools.

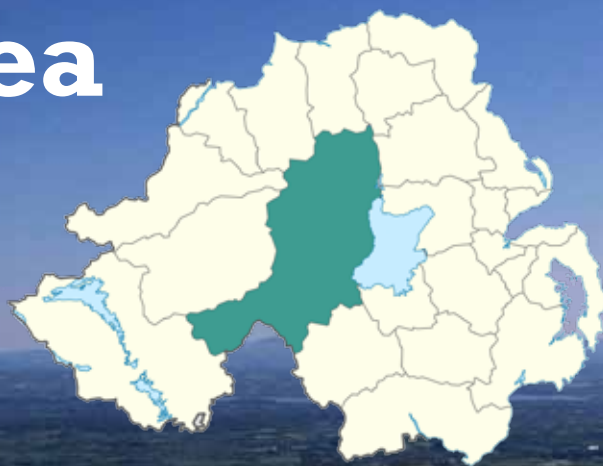
Pollution

Pollution is the introduction of contaminants into the natural environment and can take a variety of forms. Pollutants include sewage, industrial waste, agricultural run-off and litter. Serious incidents from spillages or discharges of toxic chemicals show the obvious impacts. However, there are sources which work together over time and over a wide area to impact on our biodiversity.

Nutrient enrichment effects water quality which determines the number and variety of species found in our loughs and rivers. Terrestrial habitats can become contaminated via fly tipping and illegal dumping. Atmospheric nitrogen deposition represents a major threat to biodiversity with nitrogen compounds leading to eutrophication of ecosystems.

Mid Ulster Area

Mid Ulster incorporates the Cookstown, Magherafelt, and Dungannon & South Tyrone council areas, covering an area of approximately 1975 square kilometres, (750 square miles). It stretches from Fivemiletown in the south west to Portna on the River Bann in the north, between the Sperrins in the west and Lough Neagh in the east.



View from Slieve Gallion (Calvin Harlow)

The variety of landscape patterns to be found within Mid Ulster has evolved as natural and human forces have shaped and modified the natural topography. This, coupled with an extremely varied soil composition due to perhaps one of the most geologically diverse areas in Northern Ireland, provides capacity for a wide range of habitats to develop.

Pasture dominates the drumlin topography that occupies the central areas. Upland bog becomes more prevalent in the west and south, along the Sperrins and Clogher Valley ridges. Lowland bog occurs to the northern and eastern areas on the lower lying flat ground towards Lough Neagh.

These habitats, along with loughs and wetlands, river valleys, and hedgerows and woodlands, combine to provide an important natural habitat resource. Many of these are Northern Ireland Priority Habitats, and are therefore of national importance.



“The Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan is supported by representatives from a variety of governmental, non governmental, community, and voluntary organisations as well as individuals with an interest in the areas natural environment.”

‘Pasture dominates the drumlin topography that occupies the central areas. Upland bog becomes more prevalent in the west and south, along the Sperrins and Clogher Valley ridges.’



Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan

The aim of the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan is three fold;

1. To conserve and enhance the rich biodiversity of the Mid Ulster area for both current and future generations;
2. Educate and raise awareness of the importance and variety of biodiversity found within the Mid Ulster area; and,
3. Encourage local ownership/guardianship of the Mid Ulster area's biodiversity.

The Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan is supported by representatives from a variety of governmental, non-governmental, community, and voluntary organisations as well as individuals with an interest in the areas natural environment.

Although we aim to help in the protection of all habitats of value to our local biodiversity, the following habitats have been selected for local priority action.

Within each habitat 'Key Species' have been identified. While not a Local Priority Species, these Key Species are important within Mid Ulster and action for them in the area will be supported through the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan.

Grassland Habitats

Grasslands make up the majority of enclosed agricultural landscape of Northern Ireland, forming the familiar pattern of field and hedge. Most of this is intensively managed for agricultural production and the biodiversity of these areas is generally poor. However, in areas where farming practices are less intense, grasslands can be a rich and diverse habitat supporting a wide range of species. The type of grassland that develops is influenced by soil acidity, soil moisture, climate, and past and present management. Three Northern Ireland Priority Grassland Habitats occur within Mid Ulster.

Lowland Meadow

Lowland meadow is unimproved neutral grassland, generally well-drained and herb-rich it has survived as hay meadow, but also in unimproved grazing pasture. Lowland meadow type communities may be found in recreational sites, churchyards and roadside verges. Characteristic plant species include meadow vetchling, knapweed and bird's-foot-trefoil. Scarce species include meadow cranes-bill, pink meadow waxcap, and greater butterfly orchid. It is estimated that traditional species-rich hay meadows may have declined in Northern Ireland by as much as 97% over the last 60 years. An excellent example of lowland meadow is at Knocknacloy ASSI.

Lowland Dry Acid Grassland

Lowland dry acid grassland typically occurs on nutrient-poor, free-draining soils. There are no large areas in Northern Ireland and they are scattered in distribution. It can occur as lawns in old gardens, church yards and amenity areas where regular cutting and no nutrient input results in leached acidic soils. Characteristic species include heath bedstraw, sheep's fescue, common bent, pill sedge and tormentil. Bryophytes and lichens can be common, with a number of rare fungi such as crimson waxcap. Examples within Mid Ulster tend to be small pockets within a matrix of larger habitat mosaics such as at Derryclooney Lough ASSI and Black Lough ASSI.

Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture

Purple moor-grass and rush pastures occur on poorly drained, acidic soils in areas of high rainfall. In Ireland it is found mainly in the west, and Northern Ireland contains a large proportion of both the UK and European resource. It is found fragmented in farmland as part parcels in wet hollows or field corners, and as unenclosed larger areas. In addition to purple moor grass and sharp flowered rush, typical species include sedges, orchids, devil's bit scabious and ragged robin. Within Mid Ulster purple moor grass and rush pasture can be found at: Lough Beg; Ballyknock; Ballynahone; and Slieve Beagh.

Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- **Habitat loss and fragmentation.**
- **Afforestation.**
- **Lack of appropriate management.**
- **Changes in agricultural practice.**

Local Action

- **Develop examples of wildflower areas on appropriate council land through both wildflower area creation or where suitable through changes in management regime.**
- **Develop partnerships with other landowning organisations to manage areas of grasslands to enhance the biodiversity value.**
- **Undertake publicity campaign to raise awareness of and to promote the importance of the value of species rich grasslands for biodiversity.**
- **Promote and increase the recording of key grassland species.**



Key Species



Barn Owl (Edd Deane)

Barn owl

The barn owl is characteristic of lowland farmland where it hunts at night in search of small mammals found in rough grassland. The barn owl is regarded by many as one of the most appealing birds in Ireland. Sightings however, are all too rare, partly because they prefer to hunt at night, and partly because there are so few to begin with. The barn owl has undergone a serious decline with the Northern Ireland population now estimated to be between 30-50 pairs and is fragile and fragmented.



Cuckoo (Tim Peukert)

Cuckoo

Named after its distinctive call, the cuckoo is a well-known summer visitor. Cuckoos are equally notorious for laying their eggs in the nests of songbirds and allowing the parent birds to raise the outsized cuckoo youngster. They prefer rough, marginal land searching out host species such as dunnocks and reed buntings, although the meadow pipit is the most frequent victim in Ireland. The cuckoo is in decline in Northern Ireland, probably related to the decline of the main host species, the meadow pipit.



Irish Hare (Ulster Wildlife)

Irish hare

As the name suggests, the Irish hare is only found in Ireland. They can be found in a range of habitats from well-managed pasture land through to rough marginal ground, upland bogs and forestry plantations. The upper fur is reddish-brown turning greyer in winter with some individuals developing white patches. The ears are long with black tips and the white tail is easily seen when the hare is running away. Once widespread and common, the Irish hare has declined significantly since the 1970s, although there appears to be a recovery over the last 10 years.

‘It is estimated that traditional species-rich hay meadows may have declined in Northern Ireland by as much as 97% over the last 60 years.’

Peatland Habitats

Peatlands form one of the most characteristic features of Ireland. The climate here is well suited to peat formation, with high rainfall and cool summers. Raised bogs develop in lowland areas while blanket bogs tend to occur at altitudes over 200m. Peatlands support a number of specialist species that cannot be found in any other habitat.

Lowland Raised Bog

Lowland raised bogs develop in river valleys, lake basins and between drumlins. The central dome obtains nutrients solely from rainfall and is nutrient poor, acidic and waterlogged. Sphagnum mosses are the principal peat forming species. Other plants include cotton grasses, heathers, bog asphodel and sundews. Invertebrates include numerous dragonfly species. The topography of Mid Ulster lends itself to the formation of bogs over a wide extent of the area, with examples including several of the largest remaining intact active raised bogs in Northern Ireland. The international importance of Ballynahone, Wolf Island, Peatlands Park, Curran Bog and Dead Island Bog has been recognised through protection under European legislation as Special Areas of Conservation.

Blanket Bog

Blanket bog is confined to cool, wet, oceanic climates and is one of the most extensive semi-natural habitats in the British Isles. It can cloak entire landscapes particularly in the wetter west and north. Typical species include heather, cross-leaved heath, deergrass, and Sphagnum species. Blanket bogs support a wide range of vertebrates and invertebrates. It is estimated that only 15% of the original area of blanket bog in Northern Ireland remains intact. Within Mid Ulster the best examples can be found in the Sperrins at Teal Lough and Carn/Glenshane Pass, and also on the slopes of Slieve Beagh. All three of these sites have been designated as Special Areas of Conservation.

Upland Heathland

Upland heathland occurs on mineral soils and thin peats above the upper edge of enclosed agricultural land. In Northern Ireland, blanket bog covers much of the upland landscape leaving upland heathland restricted to steeper slopes. The vegetation is characterised by dwarf shrubs such as heather, bilberry, and cross leaved heath. Heathland often occurs as part of an intricate mosaic with acid grassland, fen, bog, woodland, and freshwater habitats. This diversity increases its value for wildlife. Red grouse, merlin and hen harrier are all associated with upland heathland. Within Mid Ulster, upland heathland occurs within the Sperrin Mountains and at Slieve Beagh.

Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- **Habitat loss and fragmentation.**
- **Drainage.**
- **Peat milling.**
- **Lack of appropriate management.**
- **Scrub encroachment.**
- **Other threats – Planning developments such as wind farms and communication masts with associated infrastructure.**

Local Action

- **Identify peatlands of local importance and develop partnerships with relevant landowners to ensure appropriate and best practice management.**
- **Raise awareness of the value of peatlands for biodiversity, and their importance for a range of specialised species.**
- **Promote and increase the recording of key peatland/heathland species.**
- **Promote peat free compost and home composting at all wildlife gardening events and workshops.**



Key Species



Red Grouse (Sylvia Duckworth)

Red grouse

A bird of uplands, red grouse can be found in areas of good heather cover. A local race of the mainland Europe willow grouse, the red grouse is only found in UK and Ireland. The male is a stocky game bird with reddish brown plumage and crimson red wattles over the eyes. The female is coloured to blend in with the heathery habitat. No more than 220 pairs are thought to survive in Northern Ireland. The highest densities are centered on upland area of Counties Antrim, L'derry and Tyrone.



Curlew (Andreas Trepte)

Curlew

The curlew is a large wading bird, well known for its very long, decurved bill. In summer, it is found in peatland and wetland habitats such as blanket bog and damp meadows. Outside the breeding season they can be found mainly in coastal areas. It has declined right across northern Europe over the last twenty years. In 2000 the Irish population was estimated at around 5,000 pairs with 1,750 pairs in NI. However, a more recent survey (2011) indicates there are likely to be less than 200 breeding pairs left in the whole country - a 96% decline in 20 years.



Common Lizard (Bablestone)

Common lizard

The common lizard likes open sunny places and is usually found in dry, exposed locations where dense cover exists close by. It is most frequently seen on heaths, moorland, dry stone walls, and embankments. Widespread throughout Europe, it is the only species of reptile native to Ireland. The adult is approximately 15cm (nose to tail). Most commonly a shade of brown with patterns of spots or stripes, but everything from yellow through various shades of green to black can be found. The population of common lizards in Northern Ireland is not known, but it is likely to have declined in recent years due to habitat loss

‘The climate in Northern Ireland is particularly well suited to peat formation, with high rainfall, cool summers and high atmospheric humidity.’

Urban Habitats

The wide range of habitats found in our urban green spaces makes them extremely rich in terms of the variety of wildlife to be found there. Walls, hedges, trees, lawns, flower beds and vegetable plots all provide food and homes for plants and animals. There are an estimated 15 million gardens in Britain, covering an area of about 16,000,000 acres. This is a larger area than all of the nature reserves combined! The value of gardens for our native wildlife can not be over estimated.

Gardens, Parks and School Grounds

With many of our native habitats increasingly under threat, gardens have become ever more important for the survival of some of our well known species. The mosaic of 'mini' habitats contained within a garden can support a rich variety of wildlife, and act as wildlife corridors, linking urban green space with the wider countryside. Each garden may not seem significant on its own, but collectively, they can have a major influence on the diversity of wildlife to be found in any given area. Manicured gardens will generally be less species rich than those slightly less looked after, or into which wildlife has been encouraged.

However, even those gardens that do not initially appear to be wildlife friendly, on closer inspection, will harbor an array of species hidden away in walls, fences, hedges, flowerbeds and the lawn. In the typical suburban garden there can be as many as 250 species of plant. This is higher than in many native habitats, and although most of these are probably non-native species, this value as a food source is unrivalled. At the height of the summer, the blazing beds and borders produce a huge array of scents and nectar, a real haven for a multitude of insects which in turn attract birds, bats and hedgehogs.

Industrial/Business/Derelict building sites

Wildlife can flourish in industrial or built-up areas including business sites, retail parks and derelict building sites. Many industrial sites have areas within their premises such as neglected corners that can benefit wildlife. Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land can often have an unusual assemblage of plants, can be rich in invertebrates and birds, and support some uncommon and rare species.

Bare earth, compacted soil and even broken 'hard surfaces' can be colonised by wildflowers, providing nectar for invertebrates which will in turn attract birds and small mammals. Old derelict buildings can provide roosting sites for bats, and nesting places for swifts, swallows and house martins.

Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- **Urban development and reclamation.**
- **Inappropriate landscaping.**
- **Unsympathetic management.**
- **Invasive alien species.**

Local Action

- **Raise awareness of wildlife gardening and the benefit to our local biodiversity through public events.**
- **Promote and increase the recording of wildlife species seen in gardens.**
- **Investigate potential and develop projects to improve the biodiversity value of local parks and other council owned property.**
- **Provide advice to local businesses and other relevant organisations on development of biodiversity improvements within industrial/business sites.**

Draperstown (Lawrence Gibson)



Key Species



Hedgehog (Jorg Hempel)

Hedgehog

Hedgehogs are perhaps one of our most instantly recognisable mammals. They are almost entirely nocturnal, sleeping by day among vegetation at the bottom of hedgerows or similar places. They can be quite noisy when foraging and can be heard snuffling as they search for slugs, worms, and a wide range of insects. They will also eat fruit and fungi. The population in Northern Ireland is not known at present. In some areas of the United Kingdom, hedgehog populations have declined by 20% over the last 4 years. It is not known whether numbers have also dropped in Northern Ireland but it could be assumed declines are similar to the rest of UK.



Garden Tiger (Denis McBride)

Garden tiger moth

A colourful, distinctive species, the garden tiger is a dark chocolate brown with ochreous white streaks and patches. Hindwings are orange-red with a series of deep blue-centred, black spots. Found in a wide variety of habitats from late June until the end of August. The caterpillars are commonly referred to as 'woolly bears' or 'granny greybeards'. Once a quite common moth in Britain, it has undergone an 80% decline over the last 25 years. In Northern Ireland it is still widespread, but it is not as common as it once was.



Dunnock (Jim Middleton)

Dunnock

The inconspicuous dunnock is a common resident bird of hedgerows, scrub and gardens. It is about the size of a robin with a grey face and streaked brown back. It can frequently be seen creeping along the ground close to bushes searching for insects. There are estimated to be around 800,000 breeding pairs for the whole of Ireland. Although Breeding Bird Surveys indicates that the dunnock may appear to be making a slight comeback in recent years, it is still listed as a Priority Species due to the broad decline over the past 25 years.

‘With many of our native habitats increasingly under threat, urban green space has become ever more important for the survival of some of our well known species.’

Wetland Habitats

Northern Ireland is particularly rich in wetland habitats with lakes, rivers and streams to be found in abundance. Most open water wetland habitats have other wetland habitats i.e. fen, marsh or swamp associated with them. It is this mosaic of habitats which supports a significant proportion of Northern Ireland's biodiversity.

Fens

Fens are peat-forming systems fed by groundwater or moving surface waters. They occur in river valleys, basins or hollows, and beside open water. In Northern Ireland many have formed on cut over raised bog. Up to two hundred different plants have been found on Irish fens. Typical species include rushes, sedges, orchids, devil's-bit-scabious, common reed, and bulrush. Frog, newt, reed bunting and a host of invertebrates can be found in fens. Fens are widely distributed throughout Mid Ulster and although most individual sites are small, they are a significant landscape feature. A number of sites have been designated as an ASSI due to the 'diverse fen flora'. Drumcrow ASSI is an important fen site.

Reedbeds

Reedbeds are dominated by common reed and other large grasses or sedges. They are widely distributed on the margins of water bodies and streams, and as successional habitat on fens and bogs. Reedbeds are generally not very diverse, but are important for a range of specialist species such as reed bunting, water rail, and sedge warbler. They provide nesting cover for waterfowl such as great-crested grebe, and otters also use reedbeds. Within Mid Ulster there are good examples of reedbeds, particularly associated with the numerous lakes, with some of the largest stands around the shores of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg.

Floodplain Grazing Marsh

Floodplain grazing marsh is periodically inundated pasture or meadow. It occurs on flat low-lying areas frequently as a mosaic with other wetland habitats. The vegetation is a mixture of rush, sedges and grasses. Broadleaved herbs include marsh thistle, silverweed, meadowsweet, and cuckooflower. Grazing marsh is an important habitat for breeding waders such as snipe, lapwing, redshank and curlew. Drainage ditches, rivers, pools and lake edges are an integral part of grazing marsh containing a diverse range of wetland vegetation and can be very rich in wildlife. Within Mid Ulster, examples of floodplain grazing marsh can be found within the wetland habitats of Lough Neagh and Lough Beg.

Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- **Nutrient enrichment.**
- **Drainage and changes in water levels.**
- **Agricultural improvement.**
- **Invasive alien species.**
- **Scrub encroachment.**

Local Action

- **Undertake a publicity campaign to raise awareness of the importance of wetlands for biodiversity, including public walks and talks in good examples of the habitat.**
- **Develop initiatives at a number of sites such as Ballyronan, Traad, Washing bay, etc. to enhance their value for wildlife.**
- **Develop partnerships to assist in the delivery of River Basin Management Plans.**
- **Support work being undertaken by other organisations within the Mid Ulster area to enhance wetland habitats and species.**
- **Promote and increase the recording of key wetland species.**



Reedbeds at Upperlands Dam (David Morrow)

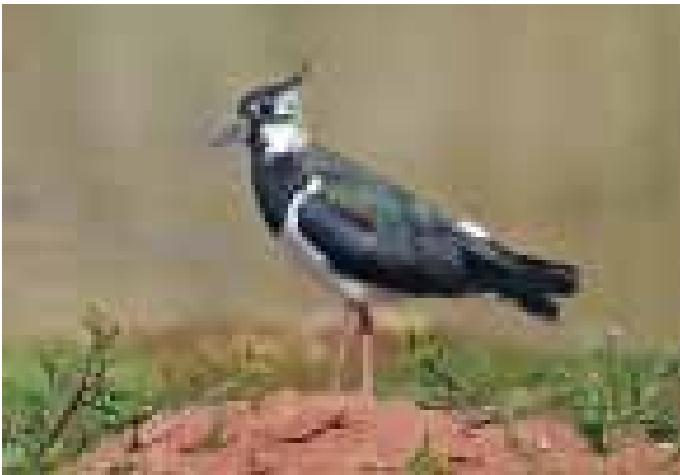
Key Species



Reed Bunting (Tony Hisgett)

Reed Bunting

The reed bunting is a small, long-tailed, sparrow-sized bird. The overall colour is brown with darker streaks. The male in breeding plumage has a jet black head and bib and white collar. They are found in a variety of habitats on the fringes of wetlands, such as reed beds and overgrown ditches, bog edge and farmland. In winter they join with flocks of finches and sparrows. Breeds across much of Europe with an estimated 16-18,000 pairs in Northern Ireland.



Lapwing (Andreas Trepte)

Lapwing

Also called the 'Peewit' after its distinctive call, the lapwing is a striking wading bird with a metallic green and purple sheen to the upper parts, the under parts are white. It has a long thin crest on its head. They breed on open, wet grassland farmland such as floodplain grazing marsh, where there is a short sward and abundant invertebrates. Widespread but declining across Europe. Steeply declining in Northern Ireland where numbers have plummeted to around 1,700 pairs.



Irish damselfly (Johannes Klapwijk)

Irish damselfly

The Irish damselfly is one of the 'blue' damselflies of which there are 4 very similar species in Northern Ireland. It inhabits mesotrophic ponds, fens and marshes. Adults fly from May until August. Principally a northern European species, it is considered to be rare or severely threatened throughout its range. The species has never been recorded in GB. Ireland is considered to have one of the largest populations in western Europe with Northern Ireland being the stronghold of the total Irish population.

'Most wetland habitats have other wetland habitats i.e. fen, marsh or swamp associated with them. It is this mosaic of habitats which supports a significant proportion of Northern Ireland's biodiversity.'

Wetland Habitats (open water)

Open water habitats range in size from small ponds to Lough Neagh, the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles. As well as being an important habitat in their own right, rivers and streams form corridors across the countryside allowing movement and dispersal for a range of species across the landscape.

Lakes and Ponds

Lakes and ponds are one of Northern Ireland's most extensive natural habitats. They are classified by the concentration of nutrients that naturally occur.

Eutrophic waters are nutrient rich and have high biodiversity. Algae and zooplankton are abundant, the submerged vegetation diverse. Typical plants include duckweeds, water lilies and spiked water-milfoil. Fish are a mix of coarse and salmonid species; birds consist of a range of waterfowl. Dragonflies, water beetles, stoneflies and mayflies are well represented. Within Mid Ulster a number of eutrophic lakes have been designated as ASSIs. Lough Neagh and Lough Beg are by far the largest, but other excellent examples include Augher Lough and Round Lough.

Mesotrophic lakes occur in marginal upland areas and have moderate levels of nutrients. They are sensitive to increases of nitrogen and phosphorous and are becoming increasingly rare. Mesotrophic waters have the greatest potential aquatic plant diversity of any lake type. In addition to water-lilies and pondweeds, nationally scarce plants such as chaffweed and globeflower occur. Fish are a mix of coarse and salmonid species, while dragonflies, water beetles, stoneflies and mayflies are abundant. There are good examples of mesotrophic lakes to be found in Mid Ulster including: Cullentra Lough; Lough Fea; Lough McCall; and Lough Na Blaney Bane; all having achieved ASSI status.

Rivers and Streams

No two rivers are alike, and neither are their assemblages of plants and animals. Rivers and streams are vitally important for invertebrates. They are also essential for commercially and ecologically important fish species such as Atlantic salmon, brown trout and the primitive river lamprey. Other species associated with rivers include the kingfisher, otter, white-clawed crayfish, and freshwater pearl mussel. Bank side vegetation acts as a valuable habitat and wildlife corridor for birds and mammals, particularly bats. The three main rivers in the Mid Ulster area are the Ballinderry, Blackwater and Moyola rivers.

Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- Nutrient enrichment.
- Drainage and changes in water levels.
- Invasive alien species.
- Litter.
- Inappropriate recreation.

Local Action

- Undertake a publicity campaign to raise awareness of the importance of wetlands for biodiversity, including public walks and talks in good examples of the habitat.
- Develop partnerships to assist in the delivery of River Basin Management Plans.
- Support work being undertaken by other organisations within the Mid Ulster area to enhance wetland habitats and species.
- Promote and increase the recording of key wetland species.

Lough Fea (Calvin Harlow)

Key Species



Freshwater Pearl Mussel (Ronnie Irvine)

Freshwater pearl mussel

The freshwater pearl mussel is known for its ability to produce pearls. The shell exterior is black or dark brown, the interior with a layer of nacre or mother of pearl. They require clear running water, with large cobbles and sandy substrata and a native salmonid population. Still widespread across Europe, but declining in numbers and distribution. Now only recorded from 3 rivers in Northern Ireland with 2 of these, the Ballinderry and Owenkillew within Mid Ulster.



Otter (John Martin)

Otter

Found in aquatic habitats such as rivers, streams and lakes. Formerly widespread but underwent a rapid decline from the 1950s-70s. There is a significant population of otters in Northern Ireland, and although the latest survey (2010) shows an increase in occurrence, they are still not as common as they once were. Otters are good indicators of water quality, requiring clean, unpolluted water with a large and varied supply of food. Dense, undisturbed areas of bankside vegetation are also required to provide cover.



River lamprey (Tiit Hunt)

River lamprey

The river lamprey is a primitive fish shaped like an eel but has no scales, and with a suckered mouth instead of jaws. Found only in Western Europe, habitats they depend on have suffered from a range of impacts. Young lampreys live buried in the silty beds of river margins. After several years, adult lampreys migrate to estuaries or the sea. They return to freshwater to spawn after which they die. UK populations are considered important at an EU level. In Northern Ireland there are important populations in Lough Neagh.

‘Open water habitats range in size from small ponds to Lough Neagh, the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles.’

Woodland & Hedgerows

Native woodland is perhaps the habitat with the greatest diversity of native species. The type of woodland that develops is influenced by soil moisture, underlying geology and past management. Within Mid Ulster all four Northern Ireland priority woodland habitats can be found.

Mixed Ashwoods

Ashwoods are dominated by ash, although locally oak, birch and hazel may be the most abundant species. They are renowned for the rich ground flora such as wood anemone, bluebell and primrose, and host a wide variety of invertebrates. Ashwoods within Mid Ulster are often fragments of woodland along rivers and steep banks, and although small, can be high quality. Brookend ASSI is a good example of an ashwood.

Oakwood

Oakwood is dominated by oak in the canopy, with holly, rowan and hazel as understory species. The ground flora varies from bluebell, bramble and fern, through grass, bracken or moss. Oakwoods support a diverse range of rare algae, fungi, lichens, and mosses. There are excellent oak woodlands within Mid Ulster and their importance has been recognised through ASSI designation such as at Crockaghole, Rehaghy, and Glenmore Woods

Wet Woodland

Wet woodland occurs on poorly drained soils on the margins of water bodies, streams and as successional habitat on fens and bogs. Dominated by willow, alder or birch, it is of significant value for mosses and sedges. It supports large numbers of invertebrates and provides hunting and breeding sites for otters, bats and birds. Wet woodland occurs throughout much of Mid Ulster with typical examples at Traad, Ballyronan and Washing bay.

Parkland

Parklands typically consist of large, open-grown trees, contained in a matrix of grassland, heath and/or woodland floras. Beech, ash and oak are the most common constituents. Parklands are rich for wildlife with a range of specialist plants, lichens, birds, mammals and invertebrates. Examples within Mid Ulster can be found in many of the old 'estates' and 'houses'. Egs. are at Parkanaur, Springhill and Favour Royal.

Hedgerows

Hedges are defined as any linear boundary comprised of planted shrubs. They are important for many species and are used as wildlife corridors allowing movement around the countryside. Hundreds of species of trees, shrubs, wildflowers, birds, mammals, not to mention invertebrates, use hedges in which to live and shelter. Hedgerows are very common throughout Mid Ulster, forming the boundaries of the small to medium sized fields that dominate the area.

Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- **Habitat loss and fragmentation.**
- **Lack of appropriate management.**
- **Invasive alien species.**
- **Nutrient enrichment and air pollution.**
- **Root damage through soil compaction.**

Local Action

- **Develop Habitat Management Plans for all significant woodland on council owned sites.**
- **Establish mini woodlands on appropriate council sites through annual tree planting events.**
- **Where appropriate, ensure all hedgerows planted on council property are of native species.**
- **Undertake publicity campaign to raise awareness of the value of native woodland and hedgerows for biodiversity, and encourage public participation in tree planting, seed collecting and tree propagation.**
- **Promote and increase the recording of key woodland species.**



Key Species



Red squirrel (Tony Hisgett)

Red squirrel

Red squirrels range in colour from chestnut through to grey-brown. They are a smaller and more delicate animal than the grey squirrel. Reds prefer woodland habitat especially coniferous woodland where they are active during the day, most likely to be seen high up in the tree canopy. Scattered throughout Northern Ireland in suitable habitat, but in decline with remaining populations becoming isolated.



Pine marten (Daniel Ahlqvist)

Pine marten

The elusive pine marten suffered through woodland clearance, trapping and persecution and by 1915 were restricted to just a few remote areas. They eat a variety of foods, including carrion, small mammals, bird eggs, invertebrates, fruits and nuts. Although generally nocturnal, they are frequently active during the day. Pine martens are largely solitary with evidence of their presence very hard to find.



Bullfinch (Mark Jobling)

Bullfinch

The bullfinch is a large finch with adult males having a crimson pink breast, black cap and face and grey back. The female is a more subdued brown. They breed in mixed woods, parks and larger gardens. Not really shy but unobtrusive and easily overlooked. Widespread across most of Europe but the population has been in decline. An estimated 8,000 breeding pairs remain in Northern Ireland.

‘Northern Ireland is one of the least wooded countries in Europe with woodlands covering around 6% of land, compared to the European average of 44%.’

Local Priority Species



Bumblebee (Plunkett Scullion)



Altogether it is estimated that there are about 20,000 species of wildlife in Northern Ireland. Very little is known about most of these, but what is known, is that a lot of very familiar species have declined rapidly in recent years. There is currently a list of 481 Northern Ireland Priority Species which require conservation action if they are to be saved from extinction from Northern Ireland.

The Mid Ulster Biodiversity Audit highlighted the variety of species found in the Mid Ulster area. It was beyond the scope of the audit to list all of the species that occur within the area so the emphasis was on those species that have been designated

as Priority Species at a Northern Ireland level. Of the 481 NIPS, 93 are considered as 'marine' and would not occur in the Mid Ulster area. Of the remaining 388 'non-marine' species, 197 have been recorded in the Mid Ulster area, equating to just over 50%.

Although a wide range of species will benefit from actions undertaken through the Habitat Action Plans, a number of species have been selected as Mid Ulster Local Priority Species for specific conservation action. These actions will work towards ensuring these species remain part of our local biodiversity.

Bats

Bats are the only true flying mammal in the world. The species to be found in Northern Ireland have evolved as nocturnal feeders, predating exclusively on insects. This strategy allows them to avoid competing for food resources with other species such as birds, and allows them to steer clear of many potential predators. They will readily exploit both man-made and semi-natural habitats, feeding wherever insects occur.

They particularly favour woodlands, their edges and the rides within them, hedges, parkland, unimproved pasture, sheltered gardens and areas where there is standing or flowing water, usually with native shrubs and trees adjacent. Bats follow linear landscape features such as lines of trees, hedges and waterways in order to commute from their roost sites to their feeding grounds. Bats use a range of feeding sites over the course of a night and concentrate on different feeding sites on different nights according to the weather conditions and insect availability.

Bats are long-lived (up to 30 years) sociable mammals. They have one baby each year and females gather together during the summer in warm, clean, draft free maternity roosts to give birth. The young are generally born in June and are dependent on their mothers for approximately six weeks. When the youngsters are able to hunt independently, the summer maternity colony is dispersed. In autumn male bats roost singularly and are visited by small numbers of females in order to mate. Bats hibernate during the winter in cool, humid places with stable conditions. Therefore, they require different sites for summer and winter roosting.

All bat species are protected under the EU Habitats Directive which is transposed into Northern Ireland law in the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations. Bats are also protected in Northern Ireland under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order which makes it an offence to intentionally harm a bat or disturb its resting place.

There are eight species of bat in Northern Ireland. Three of these: Brown long-eared bat; soprano pipistrelle; and Nathusius' pipistrelle, are listed as NI Priority Species, and have all been recorded in the Mid Ulster area. However, this plan contributes to the needs of all 8 species found in Northern Ireland.

“Bats are the only true flying mammal in the world.”



Bat (Rauno Kalda)

Current Factors Affecting the Population

- **Loss of roost sites.**
- **Poisoning (timber preservatives).**
- **Loss of foraging areas.**
- **Habitat fragmentation**

Local Action

- **Raise awareness of the decline of bats, the threat they are under, and the legal protection they have through public bat talks and walks.**
- **Encourage public to provide suitable roosting sites for bats, and provide information on the variety of bat boxes that can be made or purchased.**
- **Investigate opportunities to provide bat roosting sites in council owned properties (parks and buildings).**
- **Encourage local participation in the annual All Ireland Daubenton's Bat Survey.**

Bumblebees

There are approximately 250 bee species in the UK - one species of honeybee, 25 species of bumblebee and 225 solitary bee species. Honeybees are declining mainly due to diseases such as varroa mite, whereas the declines in our solitary and bumblebees are mainly due to loss of foraging habitat. Over the past 70 years the UK has lost over 97% of its wild flower meadows greatly reducing the forage habitats and nesting sites for bees. This has resulted in a decline of approximately 32% of the UK bee species.

Bumblebees are social insects, and in temperate climates their colonies are annual. The colony is founded in spring by a single mated queen. She emerges and forages on early flowers for nectar and pollen, then seeks a suitable nesting site at which she lays her first batch of eggs. When the first worker bees emerge (usually from mid-June), they begin foraging to provision the growing colony. The queen remains in the nest producing new broods. From late July onwards, males and young queens are produced from the mature colony. After mating, the young queens forage to build up food stores, then overwinter underground. The remaining workers and males of the colony die off by the end of the season.

Bumblebees are generally associated with herb-rich, unimproved grasslands. These form four distinct partial habitats; forage areas supporting a continuous succession of the preferred flowering plants throughout the spring and summer, nesting sites, mating areas and hibernation sites. Each is required for one of the above stages in the bumblebee colony cycle, and together they form the overall habitat matrix.

In Northern Ireland there are 13 species of bumblebee. Six of these species make up about 95% of the bumblebees you are likely to find in your garden. These are the: red-tailed bumblebee; white-tailed bumblebee; buff-tailed bumblebee; garden bumblebee; early bumblebee; and common carder bumblebee. However, this plan will contribute to the requirements of a wide range of bee species found in Northern Ireland.

“Bumblebees are social insects, and in temperate climates their colonies are annual”



Bumblebee (Ronnie Irvine)

Current Factors Affecting the Population

- **Loss of foraging habitat.**
- **Habitat fragmentation.**
- **Loss of hibernation habitat.**
- **Pesticide use.**

Local Action

- **Raise awareness of bumblebees, the threat they are under, and the importance they play in pollination of wildflowers and commercial crops.**
- **Encourage the public to provide nectar rich flowers within their garden and suitable sites for bumblebee nests.**
- **Develop examples of wildflower areas on appropriate council property, highlighting its importance for bumblebees.**
- **Promote and increase the recording of bumblebee species seen in gardens.**

Irish Whitebeam

The Irish whitebeam is a small sized deciduous tree, growing to a height of 12m and canopy spread of 8m. The bark is smooth and grey, but sometimes ridged. The oval toothed leaves have 9-11 pairs of veins with a dense covering of white downy hairs on the undersides.

When leaves first open, the white undersides can make a distant tree appear white, but gradually becomes greener as upper leaf surfaces turn down and leaves lose their white covering of hairs. The white flowers are produced from May to June in flat-topped clusters, and these are followed by the globular red fruits deepening to scarlet when ripe from September to October.

The Irish whitebeam (*Sorbus hibernica*) is one of the relatively few vascular plants endemic to Ireland. It is closely allied to the common whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) and not always easily distinguished from it. Although generally a species of scrubby woodland, it grows in a range of habitats occurring on acid and calcareous soils, in natural and man-made habitats, in open and semi-open conditions.

Irish whitebeam is reputedly an apomictic species (ie viable seeds can be produced without fertilisation). The resulting seedlings are therefore clones of the parent tree. The fruits of whitebeams are 'designed' to be eaten by birds which digest the flesh and pass out the stones which contain the seeds. In view of the scarcity of the Irish whitebeam, the whole process of seed dissemination, germination and establishment of young plants appears to be inefficient under present conditions.

Irish whitebeam is scarce in Northern Ireland, scattered in its distribution, and difficult to find. It has been reported from about eight or nine sites, but the precise number is unknown because of confusion with common whitebeam, *S. aria*. The number of trees at any one site is very small, most sites having 1 or 2 trees, so that the total population within Northern Ireland is tiny and vulnerable. The principal area of occurrence is in the Midlands of Ireland. It is a species unknown outside Ireland, therefore Northern Ireland holds the entire UK population.

“Irish whitebeam is scarce in Northern Ireland, scattered in its distribution, and difficult to find”



Irish Whitebeam (Neville McKee)

Current Factors Affecting the Population

For an endemic tree, *S. hibernica* has been relatively little studied. Therefore threats are generally poorly understood, but the following factors are thought to have a negative affect:

- **Small total population.**
- **Poor reproduction.**
- **Rarely planted (more readily available common whitebeam planted instead).**

Local Action

- **Compile database of Sorbus records for investigation for confirmation of *S. hibernica*.**
- **Raise awareness of the Irish whitebeam, its biological significance and habitat requirements.**
- **Increase the population of Irish whitebeam in the Mid Ulster area through encouraging schools/community groups to propagate and grow trees from seed.**
- **Record and monitor sites where *S. hibernica* trees are planted through the LBAP process**

House Sparrow *(Passer domesticus)*

The house sparrow is a small (14-16cm), grey and brown, robust looking bird with a stout seed-eating bill. The male has a grey crown with chestnut brown sides, black eye region and dusky grey cheeks. He has a black bib and grey breast with mottled brown back and wings. The female (and juvenile) are greyish below and dirty brown black-streaked back.

The house sparrow is closely associated with human habitation. They are opportunist and will live wherever there are suitable nesting and roosting sites and enough food, predominantly seeds in winter and invertebrates in summer. They are gregarious often forming loose colonies, typically of 10-20 pairs. In the non-breeding season, larger flocks may gather in bushes and shrubs to call, bathe, squabble and feed together.

House sparrows are resident birds and are very sedentary. Juveniles generally do not spread far from their natal colony, with up to 50% returning to the same colony as adults. They are usually very faithful to a breeding area, with nesting, roosting and foraging all usually taking place within a small area.

The house sparrow can be a prolific breeder mainly from April to August. Three to five eggs are laid per brood and usually two to four broods over a season. The nest is built in holes, usually in buildings or other man-made structures. They will use nest boxes providing the entrance hole is at least 30mm. The domed nest is made with grasses, moss and other vegetation. The chicks are fed on invertebrates while in the nest but switch to weed seeds on fledging. Both parent birds are involved in feeding the chicks.

The UK population is estimated at between 2.1-3.7 million pairs, and the Northern Ireland population estimated at around 200,000 pairs. The total Irish population was estimated at 0.5 – 1.0 million pairs. BBS results have consistently shown declines in Northern Ireland with a decrease of 19% between 1994 and 2006 and is now even absent from parts of the west of Northern Ireland.

“The house sparrow is closely associated with human habitation and will live wherever there are suitable nesting and roosting sites and food”



House Sparrow (Mark Edgar)

Current Factors Affecting the Population

- Loss of invertebrates for feeding chicks.
- Reduction in winter seed food.
- Loss of nest sites.
- Predation.

Local Action

- Promote and publicise opportunities for landowners to manage suitable habitat for sparrows.
- Provide opportunities and advice for general public on supplementary winter feed, suitable nest boxes, and cultivation of native vegetation, rich in invertebrates.
- Identify appropriate sites within council ownership to create nesting opportunities for sparrows, and create and manage areas of habitat to increase invertebrate numbers for sparrows and other birds.
- Encourage local participation in bird surveys such as: The Bird Breeding Survey; Big Garden Birdwatch; etc.

Tree Sparrow *(Passer montanus)*

The tree sparrow is a small (14cm) grey and brown bird with a rich chestnut brown head, clean white cheeks with a black spot and a white collar. It closely resembles a male house sparrow but the tree sparrow is slightly smaller, neater, lacks the grey crown, and has a smaller black bib. It has a stout seed-eating bill. Male and female tree sparrows are similar.

Being shyer than house sparrows, tree sparrows are not common in urban areas and are more likely to be found on farmland, especially in association with water-bodies and along waterways. In summer, the adults feed on a wide variety of invertebrates, while in winter they feed on grain and weed seeds in cereal stubble fields, wild-bird cover and other seed-rich crops and grasses. During winter, tree sparrows form mixed flocks with house sparrows and other seed-eating finches.

Tree sparrows nest in holes, using old trees and walls, building an untidy mass of grasses, moss and other vegetation formed into a flattened dome. They will readily use nest boxes. The breeding season extends from April to August when two or three broods are fledged, each clutch consisting of between 2 and 7 eggs. The chicks will be fed on invertebrates while in the nest, switching to weed seeds on fledging.

The tree sparrow has undergone a dramatic decline in population in the UK in recent decades, declining by 93% between 1970 and 2008. The total UK population is now estimated at 180,000 pairs. Current Breeding Bird Survey trends are unknown in Northern Ireland as not enough tree sparrows are detected to produce a reliable trend. In Northern Ireland, the stronghold for the population appears to be around the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg wetlands, although they do occur in small numbers in other localised areas.

“Being shyer than house sparrows, tree sparrows are not common in urban areas and are more likely to be found on farmland, especially in association with water-bodies and along waterways”



Tree Sparrow (Andreas Trepte)

Current Factors Affecting the Population

- Loss of invertebrates for feeding chicks.
- Reduction in winter seed food.
- Loss of nest sites.

Local Action

- Promote and publicise opportunities for landowners to manage suitable habitat for sparrows.
- Provide opportunities and advice for general public on supplementary winter feed, suitable nest boxes, and cultivation of native vegetation, rich in invertebrates.
- Identify appropriate sites within council ownership to create nesting opportunities for sparrows, and create and manage areas of habitat to increase invertebrate numbers for sparrows and other birds.
- Encourage local participation in bird surveys such as: The Bird Breeding Survey; Big Garden Birdwatch; etc.

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Swifts are dark coloured streamlined birds with long pointed wings and forked tail. They are entirely blackish-brown except for a paler throat which can be more pronounced in juveniles. The swift is 16-17cm long, with a wingspan of 38-40cm, and weighs about 50 grams. Their call is a shrill, monotone, ringing scream which is especially striking from the choruses of screams from tight flocks flying low over the rooftops on summer evenings.

Their Latin name, *Apus apus*, literally means 'without feet', and although their short legs and minute feet are ideal for clinging to walls and rock faces, they are useless for holding on to a perch or walking/ hopping on the ground. A swift never intentionally lands on the ground, nor do they perch on wires. Indeed, a swift spends almost all of its life on the wing and drink, bathe, preen, collect food and nesting material, all in flight and even fly while sleeping! Swifts are entirely insectivorous, feeding on a wide range of insects.

Swifts are with us for just 3-4 months of the year. The first birds arrive in early May and soon settle down to breed. In mid June, the non breeding birds arrive. By the first week of August the birds start to migrate south, back to Africa, and by mid August they have all gone. This short stay coincides with high insect populations and the long hours of daylight.

Swifts nest in the eaves and deep cavities of buildings. Holes around pipe-work, behind worn masonry, and missing bricks and tiles provide good nest places. The same nesting cavity is used throughout the life of the bird, with fresh material added each year which is stuck to the nest with saliva. They are single brooded with normally only 2 eggs being laid, which take between 19-23 days to hatch. Chicks take 5 to 8 weeks to fledge, depending on the weather. In warmer weather there will be more insects for the parent birds to feed to their young, enabling the young to develop quicker. On leaving the nest, fledgling swifts are not fed again by their parents, and must fend for themselves.

The swift breeds throughout Europe and across into Asia, migrating to southern Africa for the winter. It is widespread throughout GB and Ireland, although not in as great a number as in the past. A recent report estimated that swift numbers have plummeted by 47% in the UK in last 10 years.

'The swift breeds throughout Europe and across into Asia, migrating to southern Africa for the winter'



Swift (David Moreton)

Current Factors Affecting the Population

- **Loss of nest sites.**
- **Loss of invertebrates.**
- **Being migratory, the swift may be facing increasing hazards during migration and/or in their wintering grounds.**

Local Action

- **Raise awareness of the swift and encourage the general public to participate in survey work to identify 'significant' nesting sites and areas within Mid Ulster.**
- **Monitor 'significant' nesting sites that appear to be under threat through renovation/demolition to enable action to be taken to have nesting sites that may be lost, replaced.**
- **Increase the provision of nesting sites in public and private sector through the installation of swift bricks/ boxes.**
- **Provide advice and assistance to members of the public wishing to install artificial nest boxes.**

Invasive Species

A number of non-native species have been introduced to Northern Ireland, and while the vast majority of these do not cause problems for our native species, a few do. Invasive species are highly adaptable and strong competitors resulting in a negative impact on our local flora and fauna. In addition, some species can have serious economic and health & safety implications. This action plan will consider 3 common species found within Mid Ulster - giant hogweed, Himalayan balsam, and Japanese knotweed. However, should opportunities arise to carry out action on other non-native invasive species which would benefit our local biodiversity, these will be undertaken.

Giant hogweed

Giant hogweed is a very large herbaceous plant, growing to 5-6m tall, with a sap which can cause dermatitis when handled in sunlight. Introduced from the Caucasus in the late 19th century as a garden ornamental plant, it has escaped and is invasive in damp habitats. The stem is hollow, up to 10cm diameter, with purple blotches. The lower leaves can be up to 250cm. The white flower heads form a large compound umbel. Being of rapid growth, and having very large leaves, this plant will shade out less vigorous native plants wherever it grows, with the resultant loss of vegetation, insects and other animals.

Himalayan balsam

Himalayan balsam is now a common and locally abundant species along river banks and lake sides. Plants can reach 2m in height with variable coloured flowers, but usually some shade of purple. When touched the seed pods explode open, flinging the seeds a considerable distance. There appears to be no direct negative impact on animal life. However, research has shown that it competes for pollinators with the native flora, and so reduces seed set in these other plants. The plant completely dies over the winter leaving the resulting bare earth susceptible to soil erosion.

Japanese knotweed

Japanese knotweed was introduced probably in the middle of the 19th century. It is found in old demesnes, parks, roadsides and river banks. It is a perennial species with an underground rhizome from which the vertical green leafy shoots grow to about 1.5 - 2.5m each year. Flowers are whitish. All the plants are a single clone, bearing only female flowers and are incapable of reproducing by seed. Its invasive spread has been by the dumping of soil or garden rubbish containing fragments of rhizome. The plant forms extensive monocultures which virtually obliterate other plant species.



Himalayan balsam (Ronnie Irvine)

Local Action

- **Provide training to council staff and grounds managers on the identification and appropriate treatment of non-native invasive species.**
- **Work with relevant council departments to undertake survey work and map the occurrence of non-native invasive species on council property.**
- **Initiate management plans for the control of non-native invasive species on council property.**
- **Liaise with neighbouring landowners to develop a joint approach to the eradication of non-native invasive species in the local areas.**
- **Provide advice to the general public on the control of non-native invasive species.**

What you can do

For the Mid Ulster Local Biodiversity Action Plan to be successful, it is vital to have the support and involvement of local people and organisations. There are many ways you can play a part and take action for biodiversity.



Butterfly Hunt (Sperrins Gateway LP)



Get involved

Recording local species

The Mid Ulster Biodiversity Audit has identified the habitats and species that have been recorded in the area. However, it also highlighted some gaps in information for species that could be in the area but for which there are no records. We need wildlife records to help fill these gaps and to help build a better picture of what species there are in the area, and where they are living. This important information can help guide specific action to protect the most threatened habitats and species. We are grateful for all records, no matter how common you feel the species may be, but we are particularly keen to get records of those you think are rare or unusual. Perhaps you will be lucky enough to discover a species that has not been recorded in the area before!

Identifying and developing projects

Local people are ideally situated to identify local sites that could be enhanced for the benefit of wildlife. Enthusiastic individuals and community groups could take the lead in developing a site for biodiversity. We will be able to assist the project through the Action Plan process.

Practical work

There are a number of projects throughout the area where local people can get 'stuck in' to help wildlife. These projects include tree planting, hedge laying, planting wildflowers, digging ponds, building and putting up nest boxes, or even building seats for people to relax and enjoy the local wildlife.

Walks and talks

A number of walks and talks focusing on various aspects of biodiversity are held each year throughout the Mid Ulster area. Examples include: woodland walks, butterfly walks, bat nights, fungi forays, wildflower walks, swift nights, etc. Through these events people will be encouraged to learn about, care for, and enjoy their local biodiversity.



Fungal Foray (Mark Edgar)

Habitat management and species identification training

To assist with the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan, enthusiastic individuals can undertake habitat management and species identification training. Having attended these courses, people can confidently undertake management projects on priority habitats, and record species that may otherwise be a bit more difficult to identify.

Do something for wildlife in your own garden

Everyone can do something to improve their gardens for wildlife. Plant insect attracting flowers, feed the birds, put up bird or bat boxes, create habitat piles from old logs, and create your own compost heap. All of these will help a variety of species that could otherwise be having a difficult time finding food and shelter. Even if you don't have a garden, window boxes and hanging baskets can have a positive effect on local wildlife. No project is too small, and if everybody did something, it would make a vast difference.

Get in touch

For more information on the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan please contact:

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Northern Ireland
Environment
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