

Biodiversity is just another term for nature, flora and fauna, natural heritage, wildlife and the living environment. The term biodiversity, however, refers to more than individual species and includes the genes they contain, the habitats and ecosystems of which they form part, and also highlights the interdependence and interconnectedness of all living things. Biodiversity is everywhere and all around us from gardens to farmland, peatlands to woodlands, rivers to coastlines. We all interact with biodiversity and the living environment every day as we go about our daily lives. There are many ways to enjoy the rich natural heritage and biodiversity; gardening, playing on the beach, fishing, boating, hill walking or walking in the woods.

Biodiversity supports life and is an essential part of our lives. We all depend on biodiversity to provide clean air and water, healthy soils, food, building materials, and medicines. Recently there has been much interest and concern about drinking water quality in the country. This problem demonstrates the importance of biodiversity and how the protection of natural habitats can help protect essential resources such as water. The protection of natural habitats along watercourses helps mitigate against the impact of pollution and helps maintain good water quality. Careful environmental management is more cost-effective than treating the problem once serious pollution occurs. The conservation of biodiversity and natural heritage is an integral part of good environmental management and sustainability. Tourism and fisheries are particularly important for Mayo's economy and the protection of the rich natural heritage of Mayo is key for maintaining these sectors in a healthy state.

What is a biodiversity Action Plan?

A biodiversity action plan provides a framework for the conservation of biodiversity and natural heritage at a local level. The plan is designed to ensure that national targets for the conservation of biodiversity can be achieved while at the same time addressing local priorities. The production of this biodiversity plan is an action which will contribute to the protection our natural heritage.

Habitats in Balla

Improved agricultural grassland and buildings and gardens, which are usually relatively low in biodiversity value, are the most abundant habitat types in Balla. The most abundant semi-natural habitats in the study area are semi-natural grasslands. The majority of these are dry meadow grasslands of variable quality located in less intensively managed or abandoned fields or old graveyards. The extent of forest and woodland cover is unusually high in Balla and gives you that sylvan feeling when entering Balla from all directions.

Habitat Group	Percentage
Improved agricultural grassland	35
Buildings and gardens	40
Semi natural grassland	5
Woodland	12
Turloughs	3
Scrub	2
Freshwater	2
Other	1

In early times Balla was known as 'Ros Dairbhreach', - 'The Oak Wood' and the importance of the oak to the local community is reflected in the "Dawn Oak 2000" project when 2000 oak trees were planted by the

community at the beginning of this millennium, creating a new wood in Balla Town Park. The Balla Town Park which was given in trust to the people of Balla dates back to 1929 and comprises 190 acres of forests, woods and parklands. It is now the home of our local GAA Club and our unique 18-Hole Par 3 Golf Course. Balla Town Parks were awarded “Connaught Provincial Winner” in the RDS-Forest Service Awards and established a Neighbourwood Project last year which incorporates inspiring forest walks as well as a real fairy village and picnic areas. Balla Town Parks is seen as an important Local Biodiversity Area due to its high conservation value.

Hedgerows and treelines are extensive in the area and freshwater habitats are represented mainly by the River Rodney and its feeder streams as well as a number of Turloughs. The River Rodney is identified as a Local Biodiversity Area in this plan and has recently been upgraded with the addition of ‘Fish Runs’. In addition to its considerable value as a freshwater habitat for protected species its riverside habitats, including woodland, scrub and wet grassland provide resources for a wide range of species.

Water Resources in Balla

We have a beautiful and important spawning river in Balla, but it has been one of our best kept secrets. The awareness in the community of this wonderful gem has been low and little useful information is readily accessible. However since our initial engagement with LAWPRO through Mick Kane the awareness of our river (Rodney) and other magnificent local water resources, such as our Turloughs, has been greatly improved. We plan to raise awareness of the Rodney river within the Town, on the School Avenue and on the new Balla Greenway. Our application for the Community Waters Development Fund 2021 has an emphasis on creating awareness and increasing accessibility to the river.

Turloughs are seasonal lakes that occupy depressions in limestone areas, and where water levels fluctuate markedly during the year. Turloughs are a priority habitat under the EU Habitats Directive because they are more or less only found in the west of Ireland. They are generally wet in winter and dry in summer. Several turloughs are found in Mayo, mainly in the south-east of the county. Turloughs tend to contain a range of interesting plants communities that comprise a mixture of aquatic and terrestrial species reflecting the changing water levels. Turloughs are often important for bird populations, including Annex I species such as whooper swan and golden plover. The main threats to rivers, lakes and turloughs in Mayo include nutrient enrichment, siltation, drainage of surrounding wetlands and aquatic invasive species.

Balla has 2 Turloughs. One is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) on the South East of the town. This Turlough is a wildlife area of European importance with a number of unusual features which you can read about in the NPWS Site Synopsis at <https://cutt.ly/Vn6dngU>. We now intend to raise awareness through signage of the importance of the turloughs around Balla.

The other on the west of the town is where we have developed the Birdwatching Hide in Balla Town Parks property. This project was led by Balla Tidy Towns with collaboration from Balla Town Parks, Mayo County Council, National Parks & Wildlife, Birdwatch Ireland and the Community Waters Development Fund. This was further enhanced this year by erecting bamboo fencing so that visitors don’t scare the wildlife. We have also installed bird feeders and nesting boxes at the Hide. We also erected new information signs in the birdhide which were funded by the Community Waters Fund. We are planning to run awareness-raising activities to highlight local wildlife e.g. Prize for first to see a whooper swan from your new hide. See <https://cutt.ly/In6peiO>

Ecological corridors facilitate the movement of plants and animals between Local Biodiversity Areas and between habitats in the town and those beyond Balla. Apart from the rivers, the hedgerow network and patches of scrub, woodland and unimproved grassland provide some connectivity. Enhancing ecological connectivity is a priority action for Balla especially for fragmented woodlands and expanses of green areas around the town.

The countryside is crisscrossed by a range of transport corridors ranging from boreens to national roads and railways lines. The range of landscape types through which our transport corridors travel demonstrates the enormous potential for positive and sustainable interactions with these local landscapes – from small scale planting to wider habitat enhancements. With the help of Reggie Cowie TII we planted wildflowers on both sides and on all banks on the new N60 in Balla.

County Mayo's Biodiversity

County Mayo's landscape has been shaped by climate, geological processes and land use. support a rich variety of wildlife. Mayo is the third largest county in the country. Croagh Patrick (765m) is Mayo's most famous mountain, but Mweelrea (819m) is the highest mountain in Connacht and is situated just north of Killary Harbour (a natural fjord). Achill Island is the largest Irish island and boasts some of the country's highest sea cliffs. The main rivers of the county include the Moy, Deel, Owenmore, Owenduff, Newport, Bunowen, and the Erriff. Lough Conn and Mask are among the largest lakes in the country. Drumlins, peatlands, rivers, lakes, coastal zones, woodland and farmland form a network of habitats.

Over a quarter of County Mayo's land area is designated for nature conservation. This high percentage reflects the national and international significance of Mayo's wealth of natural heritage. Along with sites designated for nature conservation, Mayo has many other areas of local ecological importance including broadleaved woodlands, scrub, hedgerows, tree lines, cutover bog and wet grassland. Many of these areas are important helping to form wildlife corridors and ecological networks across the landscape. These corridors and networks allow animals to move freely from one habitat to another.

Woodlands and hedgerows

Mayo has little native woodland although so Balla as a fine examples of old native woodland should be preserved and treasured. Native woodlands and hedgerows generally have particularly high biodiversity value because of the wide range of wildlife they support.

Protected species

County Mayo is home to several rare, protected and/or threatened plants and animals (for lists see Appendices 4 and 5). Protected plants are those that are legally protected under the Flora Protection Order within the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 (e.g. drooping lady's tresses, bog orchid or yellow marsh saxifrage). Various animals are also afforded protection within the Wildlife Acts (e.g. all native mammals). Species listed on Annex II of the European Union Habitats Directive (e.g. otters, salmon and freshwater pearl mussels) or Annex I of the EU Birds Directive (e.g. golden plover and kingfishers) are also protected.

Drooping lady's tresses: This beautiful and extremely rare orchid is found at a few sites in Mayo, mainly close to lake shores in wet meadows. Recording and studying the distribution and abundance of rare plants (as well as animals), is important for monitoring the state of the environment and the impact of climate change. Rare invertebrates found in the county include the coast dart moth, Portland moth and the belted beauty. Mayo also supports a number of endangered and vulnerable bee species including the endangered great yellow bumblebee, and dragonflies such as black-tailed skimmers and keeled skimmers.

Bumblebees: are important pollinators for many plants. Several species of native bumblebees in Ireland are undergoing a decline, which may have implications for our native flora and crops in terms of pollination and setting seed. Bumblebees are incredibly important ecologically and economically. A rare native bumblebee that occurs in Mayo is the great yellow bumblebee. This species is in decline across Europe mainly due to habitat loss and isolation.

A wide range of birds are found in Mayo and the high proportion of land designated for bird conservation in the county reflects its importance nationally and internationally for bird populations. Corncrakes are summer visitors that have declined dramatically in abundance in recent years, largely due to changes in agricultural practice. In Mayo, corncrakes occur in western coastal areas and coastal islands. The 2007 singing male corncrake population was recorded as only 17 individuals. We also have whooper swans, a number of overwintering geese species such as the pale-bellied brent geese and barnacle geese, and many breeding and wintering waders including golden plover, lapwing and redshank.

The swift is on the amber list of birds of conservation concern in Ireland because its population has declined by over 40% in the last 15 years. They come to our towns every year for just four months, arriving in late April and leaving in late August. These are four important months because they are coming here to breed. Swifts are faithful to their nest sites. Once they have found a place to nest, they will return there every year for the rest of their lives. Work is being undertaken to help save the swift in Ireland by erecting nest boxes & surveying for traditional sites. We erected swift boxes with a swift attraction call system on the north wall of the Balla Community Resource Centre in 2018 which have been occupied for the last 2 years.

The Twite is a small brown bird and a member of the finch family, which once bred throughout Ireland. Today it is found only in coastal areas and in very low numbers. Mayo provides nesting habitat for up to 50% of the total national population. Twite require good quality heather (c. 300mm in height) for nesting within 2km of extensively farmed land. They feed on the seeds of various agricultural weeds such as dandelion, hawks-weed, cats-ear, maritime plantain and sheep sorrel. The use of herbicides to kill weeds has contributed to the decline in twite populations. In Mayo, twite breed in remote rural areas of the north coast of the county, often on sea-cliffs which are inaccessible to sheep grazing where good quality heather can be found. Mayo also contains several protected mammals including the lesser horseshoe bat, red squirrel, pine marten, the Irish hare and otter.

Lesser horseshoe bats are so called because of the distinctive flaps of skin around their nose. They are the only species of horseshoe bat found in Ireland, and unlike other Irish bats, they are the only ones that hang upside down from ceilings in stereotypical bat fashion. Lesser horseshoe bats are restricted in Ireland to six western counties from Mayo to Kerry, where the mild winters and foraging and roosting habitats are suitable. They are protected under the EU Habitats Directive as they have become rare or extinct in several parts of Europe. Their Irish population is increasing, however, and they are not considered threatened here (Marnell et al., 2009, National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2013). Lesser horseshoe bats hibernate underground in caves, cellars or souterrains, and at least one cellar hibernation roost is known in Balla. Their summer roosts are typically the warmer parts of unoccupied buildings. They forage in woodlands and in wooded areas or wet pastures along watercourses. As their echolocation calls are relatively faint, they rely on following linear features, such as hedgerows and stone walls, to navigate from roosts to foraging sites. They are sensitive to disturbance and light pollution, and increases in these may cause them to abandon roosts. Fragmentation of their commuting corridors is another threat, as this can lead to lesser horseshoe bats having to find new, longer routes or change foraging sites.

The Rich Habitat of Balla : *An assessment of Town Parks report compiled by Sasha van der Sleen.*

The woodlands owned by the community of Balla and managed on a day-to-day basis by Balla Town Park CLG are a well-developed woodland formation, something quite rare in Ireland today. They provide habitats for many woodland plants and animals, some of which are uncommon in Ireland today. At the same time, conservation of the variety of plants and animals in Ireland is becoming a national priority with the

implementation of the global Convention on Biodiversity and broadleaf and mixed woodlands are recognised as on the richest habitats in Ireland. Grants are available to support development for quiet recreation and conservation. The conservation of the woodland should be of utmost priority and their contribution to landscape and relaxation potential for both local residents and visitors should be carefully developed.

Survey of flora and fauna in the Balla Town Park Woodlands (Species List in Appendix)

The types of plants that grow in any area are affected by the geology, which determines the soil and the weather. As Balla residents know, the climate is mild and wet: the weather station at Ireland West Airport, Co. Mayo recorded 1655.2mm of rain in 1999, a mean temperature of only 8.8 degrees C and a mean of only 3.15 hours of sun a day .

The woodland existing today are all on long, narrow hills oriented north to south. These hills are called drumlins and they are oval-shaped of hills that occur in groups on the landscape and are always oriented in the direction of glacial movement. The material making up at least the upper layer of the drumlins is ‘boulder clay’ or clayey till, a mixture of differently sized material from rocks to clay deposited by glaciers and it probable compacted by the weight of the glacial above it. The compaction of material including clay, which is the smallest of solid particles, means that drumlin soil is heavy and has poor drainage of water through the soil, a possible reason for former landowners to allow the drumlins to remain forested.

List of Parcels	
A	Drimadoon
B	Along road north of road into to Drimadoon
C	Legaun Woodland
F	Along road to Drimadoon
H	Lagnamuck, behind Western farming Coop
I	Dawn Oak Wood
J	Drumlin along Golf Course
K	Drumlin after second bridge on new Greenway
L	Churchview Loop
M	Golf course side of railway
N	Far side of railway

Recommendations

1. The woodland formations of lower plants and trees are very well developed in Balla. Again, because of the rarity of long existing broadleaf woodland in the country, the Balla woodlands should be treated as treasures, protected and managed for nature conservation and quiet recreation.
2. Variety of species and structure is of most value both to animals and plants but also visitors walking through a woodland. This means that shrubs and open areas where ivy and hawthorn flower, for example, are just as important as tall trees. The woodland parcels are currently quite varied but they should be monitored to ensure the variety continue Gaps formed through loss of canopy trees should be allowed to regenerate naturally. Gaps along walking routes can have signs to explain this process and its slowness.

3. Parcels north of the Castlebar Road (A, B, C, D, E, F, G) should be maintained for nature conservation, as should the young trees in Parcel I. This can be advertised as part of the promotion of Balla Town Park woodland but visitors should be discouraged.
 - At least part of Parcel A (Drumadoon) should be fenced from grazing by domestic animals to allow protection of the soil and regeneration of the woodland flora.
 - Parcel M (far side of the railway) should also be protected from trampling and grazing by construction of a fence.
 - Parcel L is important in landscape and conservation and should be protected from encroachment,
4. The woodland ecosystem is in general functioning very well. However, threats to the ecosystem including the rhododendron, cherry laurel and sycamore should be removed by chainsaw and either burning material over the stump to kill it or painting the stump with glyphosate (see Hawe 1999)
5. Quiet recreation such as wading is the best type of recreational development for areas managed for nature conservation. Paintball is specifically discouraged by Hodgetts (1996) with regard to conserving plants in woodlands.
 - Paths should be constructed in Parcels K (approximately 45 minute walking loop from main road), the flat land between Parcels K and J for wheelchair or other users and to Parcel H
 - A path should be constructed under the railway bridge with a picnic area in Parcel M overlooking the fields behind, the large rowan trees there should be celebrated
6. Pony trekking could be developed to a certain extent without much damage to the woodlands.
 - A network of paths would need to be made which would be separate from the walking paths as the speed of the activities is quite different and some walkers may be afraid of horses. It is recommended that these horse tracks would be surfaced with mulch or sand, a soft covering that will protect the horse's hooves and the soil. It will also help to distinguish the type of path – walkers will know they are not on a walking path. Signs showing that it is a horse path should be obvious at any cross roads. Horses would be required to keep to paths and not graze the plants in the woodland.
7. Information should be made available in nature trails about the plants and trees in the woodland parcels and their rarity or nativeness. Rare flowering plants should be described and depicted to help their identification but with a strong caution that to pick the flowers will damage the population for future viewers.

All-Ireland Pollinator Plan

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan is about all of us, from farmers to local authorities, to schools, gardeners, businesses and community groups, coming together to try to create an Ireland where pollinators can survive and thrive. It is about encouraging a better way of managing our whole landscape to permanently support our struggling biodiversity. It is a five-year road map that aims to help bees, other pollinating insects and our wider biodiversity.

This plan identifies actions that are relevant to everyone. These actions will improve the quality of the places in which we live and visit. The Plan is about improving the quality of our environment, our sense of well-being, and our own contentment when we make things better than they were. The plan is full of good advice and guidelines which are followed by Balla Tidy Towns.

Balla Tidy Towns mission is to encourage every member of the community to implement pollinator-friendly actions. One third of our bee species, crucial to the pollination of our plants, trees and vegetables, are threatened with extinction from Ireland. This is because we have drastically reduced the amount of food (flowers) and safe nesting sites in our landscapes. Local communities can lead the way in driving a better and more sustainable balance for pollinators and bringing more networks of pollinator-friendly habitats back into our landscape. We will accomplish this by adapting a partnership approach with local authority and other groups to support pollinators. They required actions range from changing our mowing regime; to planting pollinator-friendly trees and shrubs; and raising awareness.

Balla Biodiversity and Pollinator Plan (See Balla Biodiversity Sites Map attached)

[This is a draft plan, and it will develop organically as we learn from our trials and experiences over the next few years as we strive to make our area even better and more sustainable]

Balla's recreation infrastructure includes publicly accessible greens, walkways, Balla Town Parks and other amenity areas. Local Biodiversity Areas provide many ecosystem services, such as pollination, natural pest control, nutrient cycling and natural amenity. Woodland and scrub reduce climate change impacts by taking up carbon, and farmland and forestry production ultimately depends on nature. The biodiversity management plan will include advice on supporting native species, vegetation management, habitat creation, improving ecological connectivity and increasing biodiversity awareness. Specific objectives, actions, evaluation criteria and timelines will be proposed for biodiversity management sites and projects, and pointers provided on where to go for further advice.

Aims

This biodiversity management plan identifies opportunities for appropriate biodiversity enhancement and conservation and recommends practical measures aimed at conserving and enhancing the natural heritage of Balla.

The main aims of this plan are:

- Identify habitats, areas of local biodiversity importance and ecological corridors in the Balla area
- Make detailed recommendations for habitat and biodiversity management and conservation priorities
- Make recommendations on land use planning and Green Infrastructure
- Explore opportunities for the development of educational and interpretive material for the town

Specific data sources reviewed included:

- County Mayo Biodiversity Action Plan
- The Rich Habitat of Balla
- Other relevant organisations and individuals with information about local biodiversity were also consulted:
 - Mayo County Council staff
 - BirdWatch Ireland
 - Swift Conservation Ireland
- Local Conservation Experts

Balla TidyTowns were selected by Mayo CoCo to participate in the 'IWT People for Bees series of Workshops' delivered by Kieran Flood which proved to be very successful, and we also Participated in the Teagasc Signpost Webinar on The All Ireland Pollinator Plan <https://cutt.ly/nmr48p6>

Pollinator friendly actions taken in public green areas

1. The most important action that can be taken on public land is to reduce the frequency of mowing to allow wildflowers to grow. Where possible, grassy areas should only be mown once or twice annually. They should be cut in early September to allow wild plants to flower and set seed. If doing an early cut, mow in late spring after the first flush of dandelions. Remove grass when cut in order to reduce coarse grasses and increase wildflower diversity. On a wildflower-rich site, where feasible, grass should be turned after cutting to allow seeds to fall. Allow grassy areas to grow and carry out an initial species survey to determine if a seed mix is required. Where appropriate, mow paths through wildflower meadows so that the public can visit and enjoy the resource.
 - Increasingly green areas are cut using pollinator friendly methods 6 cut & lifts per year
 - Other areas are let grow as wild meadows with just one annual cut & lift
 - A number of wildflower meadows will be newly planted in suitable areas
2. Plant a suite of pollinator friendly trees, shrubs and flowering hedgerows that will flower throughout the pollinator season
3. Maintain existing good quality hedgerows
4. Develop pollinator friendly perennial flower beds and planters
5. We have created wild pollinator nesting habitats – areas of long grass for bumblebees; compacted bare soil as well as south facing banks of soil, sand & peat for mining solitary bees; wooden structures, nest boxes, bee hotels for cavity nesting solitary bees
6. We have greatly reduced the use of herbicides and fertilizers

Pollinator friendly actions recommended in private gardens

Grow more flowers, shrubs and trees that provide nectar and pollen for pollinators. Try to make sure that your garden has at least one flowering food source from spring right through to winter e.g.,

- Willow (early spring)
- Dandelion (spring)
- Clovers (early summer)
- Lavender (late summer)
- Ivy (autumn)
- Mahonia (winter)





1. Pollinator-friendly actions in homes are encouraged - Leave small areas of your lawn uncut to allow plants like Clover and Bird's-foot trefoil to flower. Don't view Dandelions as a weed but as a vital spring food source for pollinators. See <https://bit.ly/3xSml6X>
2. If your garden is large enough, let areas grow wild with long grass to create nesting habitat for wild pollinators.
3. Avoid using pesticides. Where absolutely necessary, use them sparingly. Always follow the instructions closely and try to avoid applying pesticides at times of the day when pollinators are active or when plants are in flower.
4. Try to avoid disturbing nesting or hibernating pollinators in areas like grass margins, bare soil, dead wood or walls.

The biodiversity areas identified are: (See Balla Biodiversity Map)

- The Greens,
- Church View Wood Loop,
- Woodlands Wildflower Meadow,
- Blessed Well Walk and
- Community Garden, Orchard and Biodiversity Garden
- Specific areas within the Town Parks and NeighbourWood Woodland walks
- The 'Fairy Village' in Balla Town Parks have been further enhanced and the increased numbers of young families walking in the park, especially during the Covid restrictions, can only help increase awareness in local Nature and Biodiversity. Events such as 'Biodiversity and fairy trails, school tours, bug tours and picnics all help build this awareness when this is allowed.

The plan will be delivered in partnership by Balla Tidy Towns, Balla Town Parks, Mayo County Council, Balla Community Council and Balla Community Resources Development CLG.

Priority Actions

The immediate designation of biodiversity and pollinator friendly areas in Balla will help introduce more wildlife into the area and provide year round food for our pollinators.

The following are some action that are now taking place or have been done recently:

- Create Wildflower Meadows each side of new N60 road in Balla – MoranAgri Proposal attached
- Organise and take part in a ‘Biodiversity Training Programme’, supported by LEADER and Leave No Trace and delivered by Dr Karina Dingerkus Giorria Environmental Services.
- Develop a plan with measures to make spring bulb planting and summer bedding pollinator friendly.
- Agree a plan for all future pollinator friendly perennial beds and planters – see lists at end
- Participate in the ‘Trees on the Land’ scheme, which is a project of the ‘Green Economy Foundation’. Purchase a ‘woodland pack’ with 50 trees as well as an ‘apple tree pack’ in order to improve the variety and diversity in the area.
- Participate in the ‘IWT Working Together for Biodiversity Awards’
- Plant more trees and hedges in all green areas
- Change the mowing regime within housing estates and along road verges – cut less often and less bare
- Leave a strip of uncut grass along verges and green areas to create ecological corridors to join up Local Biodiversity Areas to enable wildlife to go from one area to another.
- Enhance our Community Garden and Biodiversity Garden by planting more pollinator friendly trees, shrubs and flowers.
- Develop a Community Orchard where we will plant Cherry Blossoms, Berries, Snowdrops, Lavender, Hellebores and Comfrey
- Plant pollinator friendly hedging shrubs along both sides of the wall in Moate
- Create a Wildlife Area at the rear of the Biodiversity Garden and installed Bird Feeders and nesting boxes as well as bug hotels and bee nests in this area also.
- Cultivate Wildflower Meadows & create a Wildflower Alley at Woodlands (cut once in autumn)
- introduce more pollinator friendly planting in other green areas in the community
- Provide pollinator signage and interpretation
- Enhance facebook page and website to highlight importance of increasing Biodiversity & attracting Pollinators. <https://www.facebook.com/BallaTidy/> & www.Balla.ie
- We have installed a Birdwatching Hide in Balla Town Parks property in Drimadoon on the Prison Road. This project was led by Balla Tidy Towns with collaboration from Balla Town Parks, Mayo County Council, National Parks & Wildlife, Birdwatch Ireland and the LAWPRO Community Waters Development Fund. This was further enhanced in 2021 when we erected a bamboo fencing to shield visitors on entry to avoid scaring the wildlife. We have also installed bird feeders and nesting boxes at the Hide. We also erected new information signs in the birdhide which were again funded by the LAWPRO Community Waters Fund. We are planning to run awareness-raising activities to highlight local wildlife and plan to run regular guided wildlife walks around Balla.
- The Swift is a bird of conservation concern – we erected nest boxes on Community Resource Centre with the help of Lynda Huxley, and we are delighted to report that these nest boxes are now being used. Involvement in this project has been very positive and as a result we have now established that we have a House Martin colony at the secondary school as well.

- Balla Town Parks and Balla Golf Club are restricting strimming and mowing of peripheral areas and have practically ceased using weedkillers and in our discussions we have drawn their attention to the guidance document on how golf courses can be pollinator-friendly and suggested that they would adopt and implement some of the proposed actions from the guidelines.
- We intend to organise a 'School Oak Project' to encourage the sustained planting of Oaks in the community
- We only allow pollinator-friendly plants to be purchased for any communal landscaping scheme
- The planters and flowerbed in Churchview have been newly planted with perennials and they also intend to plant shade tolerant pollinator friendly plants and shrubs on the left side of the entrance
- The train planter at the playground was replanted with pollinator friendly plants
- A new enlarged flower bed has been added at the entrance of College Woods with perennial pollinator friendly plants
- Woodlands estate will be enhanced as part of the Balla Community Nature Park proposal which has been submitted for TVRS funding and we hope will be completed in 2021. See <https://cutt.ly/9mAX1TO>

Appendices

Balla TidyTowns Pollinator Friendly Planting Strategy

Perennials that will attract pollinators

Examples of pollinator friendly plants are provided below. Please note that these are not exhaustive lists. There are lots of other species that are also pollinator friendly. By observing bees in parks, gardens or even garden centres you can often see yourself which species they prefer.

Pollinator Friendly Perennial Plants		Trees & Shrubs	
Aster (July Oct)	Liatriis (July Oct)	Berberis (Apr-May)	
Bellflower (June Sept)	Perovskia (Aug Sept)	Broom (Mar-April)	
Betony (June Sept)	Perovskia (July Oct)	Ceanothus (Apr-Sept)	
Bugle spp. (Mar May)	Poppy (May Oct)	Cotoneaster (May-Aug)	
Calamint (May Sept)	Pulmonaria (Mar May)	Deutzia (June-July)	
Catmint (May Sept)	Rock rose (May July)	Firethorn (May-June)	
Comfrey (Mar June)	Rockcress (April May)	Forsythia (Mar-Apr)	
Coneflower (July Oct)	Salvia (June Sept)	Hebe (June-Oct)	
Coneflower (July Oct)	Scabious (June Sept)	Horse chestnut (May-June)	
Cornflower (June July)	Sea holly (July Sept)	Lime (June-July)	
Cranesbill (June July)	Sedum (July Oct)	Mahonia (Dec-May)	
Delphinium (June July)	Stachys (June Sept)	Sycamore (April-June)	
Eupatorium (Aug Sept)	Stonecrop (July Sept)	Tetradium (Aug-Oct)	
Gaillardia (June Sept)	Sweet Rocket (May July)	Viburnum (April-May)	
Globe thistle (July Aug)	Verbena (July Oct)	Willows (Feb-Mar)	
Heathers (Aug Sept)	Viper's bugloss (June July)		
Helenium (June Aug)	Wallflower (Feb July)		
Herbs	Basil (July-Sept)	Borage (April-Oct)	Lavender (June-Aug)
Oregano (June-Aug)	Rosemary (April-June)	Sage (June-Aug)	Thyme (May-Aug)
Fruit trees & bushes	Apple (April-May)	Cherry (April-May)	
Currants (April-May)	Plum (April-May)	Raspberry (June-Aug)	

Blessed Well & Churchview Woods

Trees:

Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)
Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)
Sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*)
Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)

Field layer:

Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*)
Bent (*Agrostis* sp.)
Bittercress (*Cardamine* sp.)
Blackcurrent (*Ribes nigrum*)
Broad buckler fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*)
Buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*)
Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*)
Cock's foot (*Dactylis glomerata*)
Common bent (*Agrostis tenuis*)
Dandelion (*Taraxacum* agg.)
Dock (*Rumex* sp.)
Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)
Enchanter's nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*)
Forget-me-not (*Mysotis* sp.)
Giant fescue (*Festuca gigantea*)
Hart's tongue fern (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*)
Hedge woundwort (*Stachys sylvatica*)
Herb Robert (*Geranium robertium*)
Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*)
Iris (*Iris pseudocorus*)

Structure:

Path very clogged with annuals of disturbed ground. Broadens out to woodlands after about 100m. Gap from windthrow; wet area in middle. Canopy in woodland area is ash. Note presence of rather rare blackcurrent.

Social:

Fence of two strands; condition fine.

Shrubs:

Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.)
Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)
Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

Ivy (*Hedera helix*)
Male fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*)
Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)
Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)
Primrose (*Primula* sp.)
Remote sedge (*Carex remota*)
Rush (*Juncus effusus* ssp. *conglomeratus*)
Sanicle (*Saniculus europaeus*)
Scaly male fern (*Dryopteris affinis*)
Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*)
Sow thistle (*Sonchus arvensis*)
Speedwell (*Veronica* sp.)
Stickyback (*Gallium aparine*)
Thyme-leaved speedwell (*Veronica serpyllifolia*)
Violet (*Viola* sp.)
Wall lettuce (*Mycelis muralis*)
Willowherb (*Epilobium* sp.)
Wood avens (*Geum urbanum*)
Wood sedge (*Carex sylvatica*)
Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*)

Recommendations:

Leave intact for valuable contribution to landscape, shelter from wind for houses and gardens nearby, continuation of tree belt leading to church, to protect blackcurrent, an uncommon native woodland plant, and possible amphibian populations.

Balla - Biodiversity Sites



Gold Sites

- 1. Biodiversity Garden
- 4. Medical Centre Flower bed
- 9. Trees on Breaffy Road
- 11. Town Park

Silver Sites

- 2. The Moate
- 3. Fairgreen Wood
- 10. Heritage Trail
- 12. Croagh Patrick heritage walk
- 14. Rodney River (Balla River)

Green Sites

- 5. Claremorris Road Island
- 6. Window Boxes
- 7. Ardcranon Biodiversity Garden
- 8. Church View
- 13. Aisling Manor



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