

Wetlands of Mayo





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What are wetlands?

Wetlands are basically places that have been wet enough, for a sufficiently long time, to develop specially adapted vegetation for the animals that live in them. Wetland is a collective term for ecosystems (habitats and their species) whose formation has been influenced by water, and whose processes, characteristics and associated plants and animals are largely controlled by water.

Wetlands occur where the water table is at or near the surface of the land, or where the land is covered by a layer of shallow water, for some or all of the year. Wetlands occur naturally or can be man-made. Naturally occurring wetlands include lakes, rivers, bogs, turloughs, fens, saltmarshes, swamps and wet woodlands, produced as a result of environmental processes. Artificial wetlands include fishponds, farm ponds, reservoirs, quarry ponds, constructed wetlands, drainage ditches and canals.

Since prehistoric times, even in certain so-called "natural" wetland systems, humankind has played a role in wetland formation. In Ireland, forest clearance in the uplands helped trigger soil and vegetation changes, which together with a changing climate, altered the hydrology, leading to blanket bog formation, such as occurred in Mayo. Today, since some of these bogs have been harvested for fuel and their peat deposits removed, flooding of the abandoned peat diggings has created new shallow lakes, with marginal fens, marsh and wet woodland areas.

In contrast to some other habitat types, such as ancient woodlands, wetlands are often young and dynamic ecosystems, changing in a relatively short period of time. As vegetation changes, sediments are laid down and local hydrological conditions are altered.

“Wetlands are often young and dynamic ecosystems, changing in a relatively short period of time”



02: A mosaic of wetland habitats on a cutover bog including pools, swamp and wet woodland.

03: Claggan Mountain Coastal Trail.



Why we should value our wetlands

Wetlands are the most biologically diverse of all ecosystems, serving as home to a wide range of plant and animal life. Wetlands are a vital part of the freshwater cycle. The complex interaction of their components – water, soil, plants and animals, delivers many important ecological functions and services. Wetlands are both providers and users of water. They need water in order to maintain their structures and functions, and they provide water in times of drought and help to clean water that passes through them.

The multiple roles of wetland ecosystems and their value to humanity have been increasingly understood and documented in recent years, as outlined in the Irish Government's report on *The Economic & Social Aspects of Biodiversity* (2008). Nationally, this has led to significant expenditure to restore lost or degraded wetlands, including on blanket bogs in Mayo.

Functional wetlands are among the world's most productive environments. They are a haven of biological diversity, providing the water and primary productivity upon which a great range of plants and animals depend. They support high concentrations and diversity of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and especially invertebrates.

“Wetlands are a haven of biological diversity, providing the water and primary productivity upon which a great range of plants and animals depend”

Wetlands provide many services from which we ourselves benefit. For example:

Wetlands improve water quality by removing and sequestering pollutants and sediments in the water;

Wetlands are of high importance to fisheries. More than two-thirds of the world's fish harvest is linked to the health of coastal and inland wetland areas;

Wetlands may be of high importance to agriculture and timber production, through maintaining water tables and retaining nutrients in floodplains;

Wetlands store floodwaters, acting like natural sponges, and slowing down the force of flood and storm waters as they travel downstream. Far from posing a flood threat, wetlands should be viewed as buffers, to protect areas where people live;

Wetlands may provide important energy resources, such as peat and plant matter;

Wetlands may be of value to transport, recreation and the income generated by tourism;

Wetlands offer habitats for wildlife. Many migratory birds and other wildlife depend on the ecological setting of wetlands for their survival;

Wetlands support biodiversity. The variety of living organisms found in wetlands contributes to the health of our planet and of humans;

Wetlands provide valuable open space and create wonderful recreational opportunities. Hiking, fishing, boating and bird watching are just a few of the activities people can enjoy in wetland areas;

Wetlands are vital for preventing further climate change by acting as a store of carbon. Until recently this has not been fully appreciated, and in Ireland it has still not been adequately communicated. Peatlands are known to store 20-30% of the world's soil carbon, exceeding the amount stored in rainforests by a factor of three.



04: Wild Nephin Ballycroy
National Park.

In addition, wetlands have played a special part in the cultural heritage for humanity: they are related to religious and cosmological beliefs, constitute a source of aesthetic inspiration and form the basis for many important local traditions.

These functions, values and attributes of wetlands can only be maintained if their ecological processes are allowed to continue. Wetlands are still among the world's most threatened ecosystems, owing mainly to ongoing drainage, conversion (most often to agricultural lands), pollution and over-exploitation of their resources.

Putting an economic value on something as abstract as the ecological services of a wetland is a difficult concept, but is becoming a more accepted economic tool. More commonly, the open market puts monetary values on society's goods and services. In the case of wetlands, there is no direct market for services such as clean water, maintenance of biodiversity, and flood control. There is, however, a growing recognition that such natural functions do have real economic value, and that these values need to be included in our decision-making processes.

Wetlands in Mayo

Due to the varying topography, geology, hydrology, wet Atlantic climate, and soils, Mayo has a wealth of diverse wildlife habitats, supporting a myriad of plant and animal species. Mayo's wetland habitats range from raised and blanket bogs, fens, marshes, rivers and associated floodplains, lakes, springs, turloughs, wet grasslands and wet woodlands to various coastal wetlands.

Mayo is Ireland's third largest county with an area of 558,000 hectares and 1,168 kilometres of coastline. In Mayo, areas designated for conservation under Irish law, most of which are wetlands, cover 27% or 151,000 hectares of the land surface. In all, 1,100 individual wetlands have been identified, with fens and bogs alone covering an estimated 212,000 hectares of the county.

The following section describes some of the more frequently encountered and important wetland types in Mayo.

“ Raised bogs developed in water-filled lowland hollows or lakes 10,000 years ago, and are found mainly in the east of the county”

Raised Bogs

Three main bog types occur in Mayo – raised bog, Atlantic (lowland) and upland blanket bog, and their associated cutover bog. The common feature of bogs is that they are soft (*bogach* in Irish) to walk on because they are made of peat, which is formed from 95% water and partially decomposed plant remains.

Raised bogs developed in water-filled lowland hollows or lakes 10,000 years ago, and are found mainly in the east of the county. *Sphagnum* moss grew in these hollows, and over time their remains turned into peat, which eventually rose above the original water table, to form peat domes called raised bogs, which can be up to 12 metres deep. The surface of an intact raised bog is typically wet, acid and deficient in plant nutrients (as bogs receive most of their nutrients through rainfall) and supports specialised plant communities where colourful *sphagnum* mosses dominate the ground layer. This habitat is still common in the eastern part of the county, although peat cutting for domestic fuel has resulted in the loss of many raised bogs.

The removal of turf for fuel from bogs creates cutover bog. Sometimes, when peat extraction ceased and the bogs were abandoned, the areas regenerated secondary wetland communities, producing a mosaic of pools, bog, fen and wet woodland habitats.

Projects to restore bog habitats are underway on some of the most important sites in Mayo, funded through EU projects aimed at protecting bogs designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).



Atlantic and Upland Blanket Bog

The premier, and without doubt the most widespread, wetland types for which Mayo is internationally renowned are the Atlantic and upland blanket bogs. These are found mainly in the western part of the county in the Erris area and upland mountain ranges.

The international biodiversity and landscape value of Atlantic blanket bog has been recognised in the designation of large areas as SACs under the EU Habitats Directive. Local examples of these are the Glenamoy, Owenduff /Nephin, Bellacorick and Slieve Fyagh bog complex.

Atlantic blanket bog started to form in Mayo about 4,000 years ago, as the climate warmed and where poor drainage caused the build-up of peat (partly decomposed plant remains) in the oxygen-starved environment.

Atlantic blanket bog, also known as lowland blanket bog, is largely confined to wetter regions along the western seaboard, where the annual rainfall exceeds 1,250 millimetres. Peat depths vary considerably (1.5–7 metres), depending on the underlying topography. Described as a climatic peat type, it occurs on flat or gently sloping ground below 150 metres.

The vegetation of Atlantic blanket bog is typically “grassy” in appearance. This habitat includes important breeding grounds for a number of EU Birds Directive species, including merlin, golden plover, hen harrier and red grouse.

Upland blanket bog occurs on flat or gently sloping ground above an altitude of 150 metres, and is widespread on hills and mountains throughout Ireland and in Mayo. The 150-metre limit serves to distinguish upland from Atlantic blanket bog. Peat depths vary and normally fall in the range of 1-2 metres, but can be much deeper in pockets. Atlantic blanket bog can be extremely wet, where it occurs on level terrain and may have surface drainage features that are typical for this habitat.

Upland blanket bog areas support a number of important EU protected species, including Irish hare, red grouse, curlew, golden plover and hen harrier.



06: Doolough Valley lake and blanket bog.







Fen, Marsh and Wet Grassland

A **fen** is a wetland system with a permanently high water table at, or just below, its surface that receives nutrients via direct contact with mineral-enriched surface or groundwater. Fens also develop on areas with a history of extensive peat extraction, and such secondary fens are widespread in Mayo.

Fens are characterised by a rich selection of sedges and grasses, which make up a framework on which the flowering plants, mosses and fen wildlife depend. Four main fen types are recorded in Mayo – poor fen, quaking bog or transition mire, alkaline fen and *cladium* fen.

Poor fen is found in blanket bog areas, where water flowing over the bog surface creates enriched habitat conditions suitable for non-bog species to thrive.

Quaking bog or transition mire is frequent throughout the county on lakeshores, in wet infilling hollows and in regenerating cutover bog areas.

Alkaline fen and *cladium* fen are influenced by base-rich alkaline water containing calcium carbonate. These habitats are found in the southern and eastern parts of the county, such as the fens at Lough Carra or Mannin and Island Lakes.

Marsh occurs in scattered fragments, often in a complex mosaic with a range of other wetland habitat types, such as wet grassland, fen, wet woodland and swamp. It is an ideal habitat for breeding waders, such as snipe, and numerous invertebrate species.

Wet grassland may be one of the commonest wetland habitats in Mayo. It is found on flat ground along rivers, beside lakes, around bogs and on drumlin slopes. The wet mineral or organic soils are poorly drained or subject to periodic flooding. Wet grassland commonly occurs in areas of farmland that have not recently been affected by drainage and/or fertiliser application, and is often characterised by the occurrence of rushes and a range of broad-leaved herbs.

Natural wet grasslands are rich in invertebrates, making them ideal breeding sites for ground-nesting waders, such as redshank, snipe, lapwing and curlew. Wet grassland areas are susceptible to changes in management, such as fertilizer application or increased drainage, which reduces species diversity.



Lake, River and Swamp

“Swamps contain tall perennial grasses such as bulrush, common reed and reed canary-grass”

Mayo has a large selection of **lake** types. Hard water lakes of limestone areas are rich in base elements and are poor to moderately rich in nutrients. The water is typically clear and the lake sediment usually has a high proportion of marl, a white clay precipitate. Marl-forming stoneworts are often abundant. These lakes are frequently fringed with alkaline fen vegetation.

Mesotrophic lakes are waterbodies that are moderately rich in nutrients, and the water is sometimes discoloured by algae. Characteristic aquatic plants include white water-lily, yellow water-lily and a range of pondweeds.

Eutrophic lakes and ponds are waterbodies that are high in nutrients and rich in base elements. The water is usually discoloured or cloudy, often grey to green in colour, from the abundant algae and suspended matter present.

Turloughs or temporary lakes, which occur in limestone areas, are a unique Irish lake type that are frequently found in the southern part of the county. They are an internationally important wetland type.

Rivers are an important wetland habitat in Mayo, in both the uplands and lowlands. Eroding upland rivers include turbulent watercourses that are actively eroding and unstable, and where there is little or no deposition of fine sediment. These rivers vary in size but are usually smaller and shallower than depositing rivers.

Depositing rivers include those where fine sediments are deposited on the river bed. Depositing conditions are typical of lowland areas where gradients are gentle and water flow is slow and sluggish. These rivers vary in size but are usually larger than eroding rivers. In a natural state, these rivers erode their banks and meander across floodplains. Wet woodlands may occur on the banks of such rivers.

Swamp habitat occurs around many of the lakes in Mayo and usually remains waterlogged throughout the year. Swamps contain tall perennial grasses such as bulrush, common reed and reed canary-grass. Swamps are rich in invertebrate life and support a number of bird species, including reed warbler, moorhen and other waterfowl. They are also prime habitats for a number of freshwater molluscs and water beetles and provide ideal cover for otter.



08: Lapwing and whooper swans at Tawny Lough.

09: Large reedswamp area near Louisburgh.

Salt and Brackish Water Coastal Wetlands

Coastal areas in Mayo include a range of important salt water and brackish water wetland habitats, such as saltmarsh, coastal lagoons, tidal rivers and inlets and dune slacks.

Saltmarsh occurs in areas covered by sea water for part of the day, or during high tides. Lower saltmarsh is subject to more prolonged submersion by sea water and is more strongly saline than upper saltmarsh. As a result, it is characterised by a predominance of halophytes, or salt-tolerant plants.

Common saltmarsh-grass usually dominates the seaward edge of the saltmarsh and often forms a short turf with glassworts. Further inland, thrift, sea plantain and sea arrowgrass are prominent in the vegetation and may occur together with common saltmarsh-grass and sea aster.



Upper saltmarsh is subject to less frequent and less prolonged inundation by the sea and, as a result, is not as saline in character as lower saltmarsh. Vegetation is typically dominated by rushes and red fescue. Saltmarshes are found at various locations in the county, such as Mulranny on Clew Bay and north of Geesalia on Blacksod Bay.

Coastal lagoons are enclosed bodies of standing brackish water that are wholly or partially separated from the sea by banks of sand, shingle or rock, or by land barriers of rock or peat. Tidal influence is much reduced by these physical barriers or may be totally absent.

Tidal rivers occur in the lower reaches of rivers or streams that are tidal and where there are regular fluctuations in salinity, and in the rate and direction of water flow.

Dune slacks are nutrient-enriched wet areas that occur in hollows or depressions either behind or between dune ridges, or in blow-outs in sand dunes. The water table is either at, or close to, the surface for much of the year. Vegetation typically comprises creeping willow, common reed, sedges, rushes and wetland herbs. A range of native orchids will occur in such areas.

10: Saltmarsh community with sea pink and sea milkwort.

11: Saltmarsh habitat at Bellacragher Bay.



Wetland biodiversity in Mayo

Wetlands are the most biologically diverse of all ecosystems, serving as home to a wide range of plant and animal life.

Wetlands are a critical part of our natural environment and play a key role in supporting Mayo's biological diversity. Wetlands are rich in biodiversity, supporting numerous species from all of the major groups of organisms – from microbes to plants, invertebrates, amphibians, birds and mammals. Wetlands support species during important life stages by providing breeding, roosting, nesting and feeding habitats, as well as refuges during adverse weather conditions. They also form corridors or stepping stone habitats by providing stop-offs that support the migration of species such as waterbirds.

Physical and chemical features of the wetland habitat, including climate, topography (landscape shape), geology, nutrients and hydrology (the quantity and movement of water), determine which plants and animals will inhabit various wetland habitat types.

“Wetlands are rich in biodiversity, supporting numerous species – from microbes to plants, invertebrates, amphibians, birds and mammals”



12: Species diversity on a bog island in blanket bog pool.



13: Cottongrass or bog cotton (*ceannbhán* in Irish).



14: Colourful combination of *sphagnum* moss, cranberry and club fungus on a raised bog hummock.

Plants

Wetland plants (or hydrophytes) are plants that grow in water or need a waterlogged environment, and include a large variety of trees, shrubs, herbs, grasses, sedges, ferns, mosses and algae. Many of these species have special adaptations to allow them to live in such an environment. Shallow roots or hollow stems allow the root system to survive during times of waterlogging and low oxygen levels. These adaptations also enable plants to grow in extremely acid habitats such as bogs.



15: Heath spotted-orchid occurs only on acidic substrates, and is a commonly seen species on bogs and heathlands in Mayo.



16: *Sphagnum pulchrum*, a western species found on bogs in Mayo. Without *sphagnum* moss there would be no bogs in Ireland. When *Sphagnum* dies the remains accumulate to form peat.



17: The Mediterranean heather found around Bellacragher Bay and Carrowmore Lake is one of Mayo's rarer heathers. It also grows in north-west Spain.



18: Oblong-leaved sundew is an insectivorous plant of western bogs, such as those at Creggannagappul. The plant gets nutrients by trapping and digesting insects on its sticky leaves.



19: Bogbean, with its star-like, feathery, white flowers, grows in bog pools. Its leaves resemble those of broad beans.



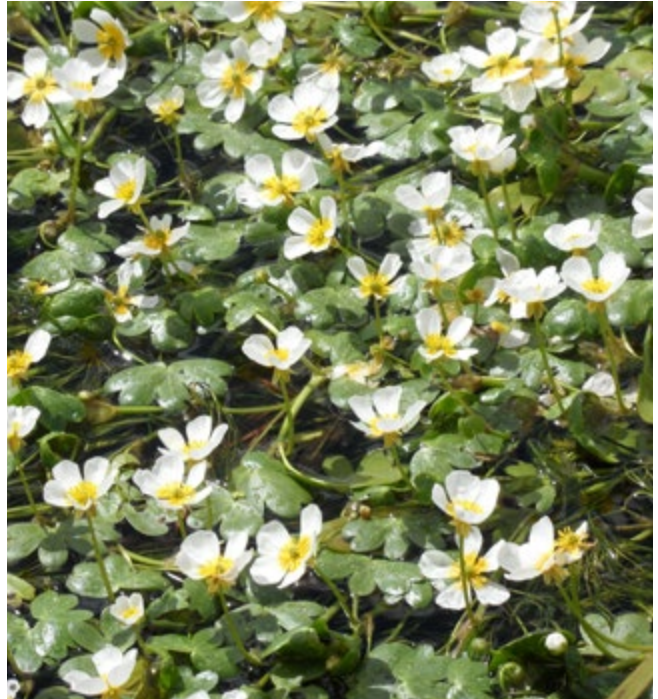
20: Common knapweed on road edge at Bellacorick Bog. This plant provides a great deal of nectar for pollinators.



22: Large *sphagnum* moss hummocks found on blanket bog are often used by birds as an elevated lookout post on the bog surface.



21: Purple spoonwort, a liverwort characteristic of lowland blanket bog in Mayo.



23: Pond water-crowfoot, a member of the buttercup family, is generally found floating on the surface of slow flowing streams.



24: Heather or ling heather is the most abundant plant on heathland and bog, where it prefers acidic or peat soils.



25: Marsh helleborine, a large orchid found in calcium-rich wetlands, including fens.

Wetland Wildlife

The many wetland plants and the habitats they create are home to a large array of animals. Some of these animals use both wetland and adjacent dryland habitats during their life cycle (e.g. birds of prey and bats). Others live out their entire life within the wetland habitat and are completely dependent on the wetland for their survival (e.g. otter, grouse, curlew, amphibians, and many invertebrates, moths and butterflies). Many of these wetland species have declined significantly in recent times, as wetlands have been reclaimed and reduced in number.

Mayo's many lakes and rivers are rich in fish life, and provide a valuable income stream for the county from visiting anglers.

26: The viviparous lizard, our only native reptile, is found in many lowland bog and heathland areas in Mayo.



27: Lesser horseshoe bat is one of Ireland's smallest mammals. In Ireland, the lesser horseshoe is confined to just six western counties, of which Mayo is one.



28: Meadow pipit is a common nesting bird of bogland, heathland and rough grassland, while in winter it spends time in farmland and saltmarsh areas.



29: Ireland's largest population of freshwater pearl mussels, protected under the EU Habitats Directive, occurs in the Bundorragha River catchment.



30: The common frog is our most abundant and widespread amphibian and is found in many wetland types in Mayo.



31: Swamps are rich in invertebrate life and are prime habitats for otter.

32: Mute swans nesting in reeds swamp habitat on a lakeshore. Wetlands are important feeding, nesting and roosting areas for many species of bird.

Wetland Invertebrates



33: The common blue is the most widespread blue butterfly in Ireland and is found in a variety of grassy habitats.

34: The large ground beetle *Carabus glabratus* lives among heather and litter on well-vegetated lowland bog, such as those at Bellacorick Bog SAC.



35: Marsh fritillary butterfly.



36: Sawfly resting on devil's bit scabious, a plant frequent in wetlands. Devil's bit scabious is the food plant of the caterpillar-like larvae of this species.



37: Four spot-orbweaver spider is found on bogs and heathland, where it weaves a large orb web on tall grass stems and heather.

38: Newly emerged dragonfly resting on bogbean leaf in a *sphagnum*-filled raised bog pool.



39: Birch shieldbugs resting on birch leaf.



40: Sand-dusted fox moth caterpillar at Elly Bay, Mullet Peninsula.



41: One of the largest moths found in wetlands is the emperor moth, whose caterpillars feed on ling heather, bilberry and other wetland plants.



Where to explore wetlands in Mayo

Mayo has an array of world-class wetlands to visit and enjoy. This section is divided into four themes to help you explore the bogs, lakes and rivers and coastal wetlands, including those found on walking trails and greenways. Many of these sites are open to the public to explore and learn more about wetlands. They have a variety of visitor facilities including parking, paths, boardwalks, exhibitions and information signs, that will help you enjoy a visit to these magical places and learn about their value. Irish wetland sites are shown on the Map of Irish Wetlands (see bit.ly/MapofIrishWetlands). This section is based on the Mayo sites depicted on the map.

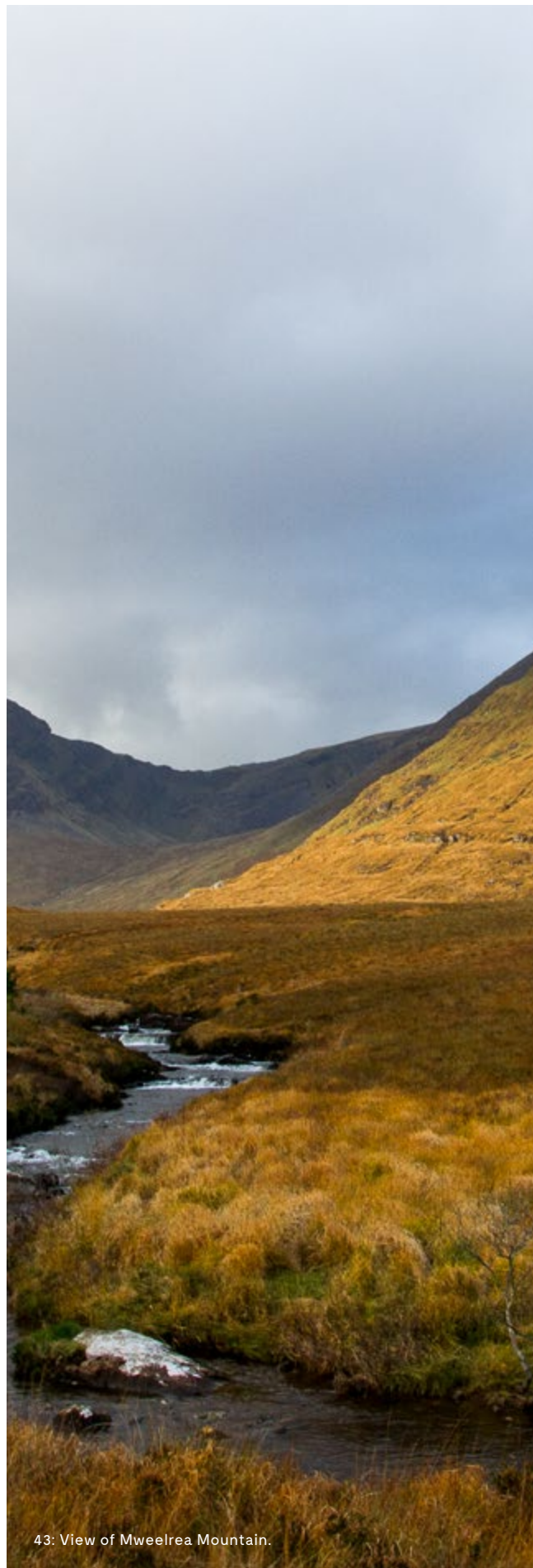
Bogs

Mayo is internationally famous for its boglands, especially the extensive areas of Atlantic and upland blanket found in Erris in the west of the county, while raised bogs are more common in the east of the county. Some of the lowland blanket bogs are in a pristine condition, unaffected by human activities.

Other bogs, however, have been degraded by past developments, such as peat cutting or removal and afforestation. Today, their unique value as vital carbon stores and biodiversity areas is being recognised and restoration projects are underway to rehabilitate some sites. At the Céide Fields visitor centre near Ballycastle, you can also explore the history of bogland from the Neolithic period, dating back to 6,000 years ago, to the present day.



42: Céide Fields.



43: View of Mweelrea Mountain.



Wild Nephin Ballycroy National Park

The Wild Nephin Ballycroy National Park, located in north-west Mayo, was established in 1998. Comprising more than 15,000 hectares of Atlantic blanket bog and mountainous terrain, it covers a vast, uninhabited and unspoilt wilderness dominated by the Nephin Beg mountain range. To the west of the mountains is Owenduff Bog. This is one of the last intact blanket bog systems in Western Europe, and is an important scientific and scenic feature of the National Park. The Park protects a variety of other important habitats and species.

There is a visitor centre at Ballycroy, with parking, café, interpretive exhibition and a loop walking trail. Further information is available at: www.wildnephinnationalpark.ie

44: Exploring Claggan Mountain Coastal Trail.

45: Having fun in Wild Nephin Ballycroy National Park.

46: Eskeragh Bog EU LIFE site boardwalk.



Eskeragh Bog EU LIFE Site

Eskeragh is located just south of the main Ballina to Belmullet (N59) road, approximately 10 kilometres west of Crossmolina. The bog is one of Coillte's EU LIFE programme demonstration sites, which showcases the conservation work undertaken on this former conifer forestry area to recreate and restore active lowland blanket bog on the site. It is a one of a number of such projects being undertaken in Mayo.

Facilities include parking, interpretive sign and raised boardwalk. Further information is available at: www.irishbogrestorationproject.ie



47: Drumleen Lough.

Drumleen Lough Loop Walk

This lake, located on the regional road R312 near Keenagh, is a designated Natural Heritage Area. Drumleen Lake was formed when melting glacial waters lodged between ridges of sediment during the last Ice Age. A 3-kilometre loop walk around the lake allows visitors enjoy the lake and its lakeshore communities, including wet grassland and heathland. The wet grassland at Drumleen is remarkable for the occurrence of whorled caraway, a plant which is not found anywhere else in Connacht.

Facilities include parking, picnic area, interpretive signage and a loop walking trail.

Clare Lake Walk at McMahon Park

Clare Lake, with its well-designed walking trails, is located in the town of Claremorris. The lake is fringed by reedswamp and woodland areas, and is a great place to explore nature. The park has lots of amenities to engage visitors.

Facilities include parking, angling spots, wheelchair access, picnic area and a loop walking trail.

Lakes and Rivers

Mayo boasts a myriad of lakes that vary in size, and an extensive network of rivers. The lakes and rivers offer flora and fauna (including many fish and invertebrate species) a range of different wetland habitats. Because of their nature conservation significance in a European context, a number of these, such as the River Moy, Newport River, Lough Conn, Lough Carra, Carrowmore Lake and Lough Cullin, have been given protection as SACs or are designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for various birds.

The most important river in the county is the River Moy, which, fed by 45 smaller tributaries, drains all of east Mayo.

Other main rivers include the Newport River, the Deel, Owenmore, Owenduff, Robe, Aille, Bundorragha and Erriff. The large limestone lakes include Lough Corrib, Lough Mask, Lough Conn, Lough Cullin and Lough Carra, well known for their natural beauty. The other main lakes are Carrowmore Lake, Beltra Lake, Lough Feagh and Lough Furnace.

Many of these lakes and rivers offer fishing, walking, outdoor adventure pursuits and wonderful opportunities to explore their freshwater biodiversity.

You can learn more about lakes and rivers to explore at: www.mayo.ie



48: Clare Lake.



49: Coastal wetlands.

Coastal Wetlands

Although not immediately associated with wetlands, coastal areas include a number of important wetlands types, such as saltmarsh, coastal lagoons, dune slacks, bays and inlets. Habitats such as wet coastal grassland or machair are unique habitats that occur in such locations in Mayo. Many coastal wetlands are included among the many visitor points along the Wild Atlantic Way. These include Clew Bay, with its many islands and saltmarsh, the cliffs at Downpatrick Head and on Achill Island, the fjord landscape of Killary Harbour, and the sand dune and machair systems at Dooaghtry and Old Head Beach, near Louisburgh.



50: Mulranny, Clew Bay.

Mulranny – Clew Bay

The coastal wetlands at Mulranny, located at the north-western end of Clew Bay, are accessed via a causeway built across Trawoughter Bay in 1889. The causeway links the village and the Mulranny Park Hotel to the spectacular marine coastal environment, including Mulranny's Blue Flag beach, Rosmurrevagh machair, Mulranny saltmarsh and Mulranny pier. The saltmarsh has a wealth of flora and fauna, and plays host to an impressive array of birds, many of which are migratory. Facilities include parking, a causeway and walking paths. Find out more at: www.mulranny.ie



51: Dooaghtry, near Louisburgh.

Silver Strand and Uggool Beach

The area around Dooaghtry and Thallabawn, in south-west Mayo, at the mouth of Killary Harbour and flanked by Mweelrea Mountain to the east, is a spectacular and remote location to visit. A range of coastal lakes, machair, dune slacks and bays centered on Silver Strand and Uggool Beach can be explored. The location is a Discovery Point on the Wild Atlantic Way. Facilities include parking, a picnic area, short walking paths. Find out more at: www.louisburgh.ie

Walking Trails and Great Western Greenway

An extensive selection of walking routes and cycle ways take visitors through some of the county's most spectacular scenery, giving an unparalleled experience of some of Ireland's largest blanket bogs, mountain and coastal wilderness areas and offshore islands. Meanwhile, the county's eastern walking routes allow visitors to explore the lake landscapes of Lough Conn, Lough Carra and Lough Corrib.

Great Western Greenway

An off-road and traffic-free 45-kilometre long cycling and walking route, the Great Western Greenway follows the old railway line from Westport to Achill. Constructed in the 1890s, the line closed in 1937. Passing through the towns of Newport and Mulranny, along the coast of the picturesque and unique Clew Bay, the greenway passes by Lough Furnace, along Bellacragher Bay and through the bogs on the Curraun Peninsula. Find out more at:

www.activeme.ie/guides/the-great-western-greenway/

Mayo Walking Trails

Walking trails in Mayo cater for all tastes and fitness levels, from a Sunday afternoon stroll in Raheens Wood, west of Castlebar, to full or multi-day mountain walks, such as the 61-kilometre Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail from Balla to Croagh Patrick.

In the east of the county, the Larganmore Loop Walk, which starts in the townland of Glanduff, just east of Foxford, takes walkers over 14 kilometres of surfaced roads, country lanes and bog and mountain tracks. Two further trails, the Drumsheen Loop and Glen Loop, both part of the Ox Mountain Trail, offer attractive walks following bog tracks, quiet roads and green laneways, with impressive views across the north Mayo countryside. Find out more about walking and hiking trails at: www.mayowalks.ie and www.northmayo.ie



52: Hiker taking in the scenery in the Wild Nephin area.

“walking routes and cycle ways in Mayo take visitors through some of the county’s most spectacular scenery”



How you can help Mayo's wetlands

Remember

Wetlands = water

Wetlands = wildlife

Wetlands = flood control

Wetlands = climate change mitigation

Wetlands = amenity and recreational open spaces

Wetlands = economic value to County Mayo

Wetlands = winter and summer colour in our countryside

Wetlands = life

Learn More About Wetlands

Learn more about wetlands, their wildlife and value by visiting one of the sites suggested in this booklet. Remember to pick up all litter and dispose of it in appropriate waste bins or – even better – take it home and recycle it.

Stop the Spread of Invasives

A threat to many wetlands is the negative effect of invasive species (plants or animals) on biodiversity. Giant rhubarb, giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and Australian swamp stonecrop are among the worst flora culprits. If they establish in a wetland, they can cause health risks and affect the occurrence of native wetland plants, which tend to be crowded out. Similarly, invasive fauna such as the zebra mussel can alter the ecology of lakes, affecting angling.

Make sure to take precautions and do not help the spread of invasive species. Report the occurrence of these species to the County Council or the National Biodiversity Data Centre. Join with a local group that is trying to eradicate a species from your area. Find out more at: www.biodiversityireland.ie





54: Wetland dumping.

55: Giant rhubarb, an invasive alien plant, predominantly found in western coastal counties.

Organise a Wetland Clean-up

Participate in, or organise, a clean-up event of your local wetland and coordinate with other volunteers to help save or restore a wetland habitat. Contact your local Heritage Office, Tidy Towns group, community groups, environmental group or non-government organisation, to find out about any events near you.

Prevent Wetland Infilling

Infilling areas of wetland, even pieces of wetland on the edge of a large site, has negative impacts on the whole site and the functions it performs. Infilling can cause flooding in other places that have never previously flooded, due to a loss in water absorption capacity of the damaged wetland.

Infilling directly removes wildlife habitat for plants, insects, butterflies, dragonflies and birds. It is unsightly and destroys the natural character and beauty of an area.

Infilling requires a waste permit from the Local Authority. Take measures to ensure that your construction and demolition waste is going to a permitted site. Or better still, try to re-use construction waste and all subsoil on site, as part of your development.

Prevent Wetland Dumping

Dumping domestic waste and other waste in wetlands can affect water quality and result in surface water and groundwater pollution. Dumping is unsightly and illegal, and shows little respect for our environment. Report any illegal dumping to Mayo County Council at: www.mayo.ie/environment

Create your own Rural or Urban Wetland

Creating a small wetland in your garden or on the farm is very simple, even when there are no natural wet spots. It's a great way to attract different types of wildlife into your garden or onto your land. There are lots of websites that can help you find the ideal design for your conditions. Plant only native species of trees, shrubs and flowers to preserve the ecological balance of your wetland. Find out more at: www.mayo.ie/heritage and www.pollinators.ie

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Cover Image: Wild Nephin Ballycroy National Park

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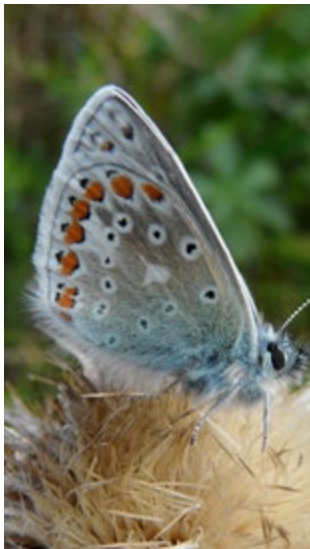
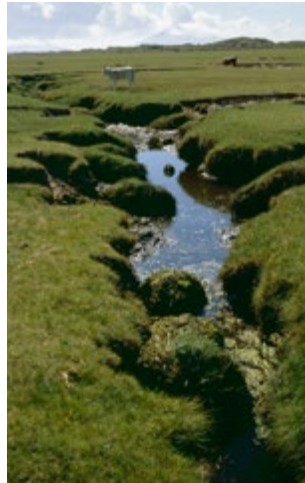




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This booklet aims to raise awareness of Mayo's wetland heritage and improve understanding of the role of wetlands in all our lives, as a natural asset benefiting everyone.

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