

Cape Clear Island Biodiversity Action Plan 2026 – 2031



Lough Errul, the island's only lake (showing flax soaking pond), within the Ballyieragh study area.

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Ecological survey and Fieldwork by Wildeye Ltd.

Supported by Community Foundation Ireland in partnership with the

National Parks and Wildlife Service, Biodiversity Fund 2024

Oileán Chléire, West Cork · A Gaeltacht island community



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Foreword

Cape Clear Island, Oileán Chléire, is the southernmost inhabited place in Ireland and a Gaeltacht community of fewer than 100 full-time residents. For over sixty years it has held an international reputation as one of Ireland's finest places to watch wildlife, thanks to the decades of dedicated work by BirdWatch Ireland and the Cape Clear Bird Observatory. Yet, until now, the island's habitats had never been systematically surveyed and recorded.

This Biodiversity Action Plan changes that. Commissioned by Tograí Chléire and supported by Community Foundation Ireland in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, it brings together the first professional habitat survey of the Ballyieragh area, the wealth of species knowledge built up over generations, and the priorities of the island community, into a single practical plan. It embodies the 'whole-of-society' approach set out in Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan: a small community learning about its own local biodiversity and using that knowledge to shape a plan unique to its place. It sets out what lives here, what is under pressure, and, most importantly, what we can do about it over the next five years.

A plan is only as good as the action it inspires. The actions in this document are deliberately practical and rooted in island life: managing our verges and stone walls for pollinators, welcoming visitors with information about the wildlife around them, supporting farmers to farm with nature, and tackling the threats, invasive plants, and pressure on ground-nesting birds, that we can realistically influence. We hope it will guide the work of Tograí Chléire, our farmers and landowners, and everyone who cares about Cape Clear, for years to come.

"When a small island community is given the tools to understand its own natural environment, the response is engagement, curiosity and action."



Island children planting native oak trees, connecting the next generation to the habitats surveyed for this plan.

Executive Summary

Cape Clear Island, Oileán Chléire, is Ireland's most southerly offshore island and a Gaeltacht community long renowned for its wildlife. This Biodiversity Action Plan, prepared by Tograí Chléire with support from Community Foundation Ireland in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, is the first systematic record of the habitats and species of the island's western area, Baile Iarthach (Ballyieragh), and sets out how the community will protect and enhance them over the period 2026–2031.

A professional habitat survey in 2025 mapped the study area to the Fossitt classification, recorded plant species and deployed bat detectors, producing a baseline habitat map and species lists for an area that had never before been systematically surveyed. The plan draws these findings together with the island's exceptional bird-recording history and the community's own knowledge and priorities.

Ballyieragh is rich and largely semi-natural: coastal heath (much of it within the Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC), three wetland bogs, the island's only lake (Lough Errul), species-rich grasslands, and a distinctive stone-wall landscape. It supports red-listed butterflies, moths and bees, internationally important bats and Otter, and a nationally significant flora. The main pressures are land abandonment (bracken and gorse encroachment), invasive species, and a growing disconnect from nature.

The plan is organised under four objectives, making the island biodiversity-friendly, raising awareness, collecting evidence and monitoring, and species- and habitat-specific measures, delivered through around thirty prioritised actions, each with a lead, timeframe and indicative cost (summarised in Appendix 5). Priorities include invasive-species control (including a vinegar-based Japanese Knotweed trial and a rat-eradication feasibility study), bog rewetting, improving the water quality of Lough Errul, supporting farmers through ACRES, and a strong programme of community and school engagement. Progress will be reviewed each year, with a full review in 2031.

1. Introduction

1.1 Cape Clear Island

Oileán Chléire, or Cape Clear Island, lies approximately 6 kilometres off the south-west coast of County Cork and is the southernmost inhabited place in Ireland. The island is small, measuring about 5 by 2 kilometres, with fewer than 100 full-time residents. It consists of two parts divided by a narrow isthmus known as 'The Waist'. The geology is based in Old Red Sandstone, outcrops of which are a prominent feature of the landscape.

Cape Clear has been inhabited since at least the Neolithic (4000–2500 BC); the remains of a passage tomb have been recorded at Killickaforavane in the east of the island. It is a Gaeltacht area and home to two Irish colleges which take in students over the summer. Alongside its living Irish language and rich cultural heritage, the island is a popular tourist destination, both for day trips and longer stays.

Tograí Chléire, established in 2021, is the island's heritage, culture and environment group and a registered charity with the Charities Regulator. It has delivered a range of environmental and cultural projects with local ecologists and the community, including creating freshwater ponds on farmland through the Heritage Keepers project, installing a community biodigester and garden, raising nearly €100,000 to begin the restoration of a historic fishing vessel, the Ard Casta, facilitating an ongoing fishing-heritage photographic display (Ionad Mara Chléire), running annual Tidy Towns participation, and supporting local sheep farmers through the trademarked Geansaí Chléire knitting project. Tograí Chléire has close links to the island's Bird Observatory and has long championed the island's natural heritage. This Biodiversity Action Plan is the natural next step in that work.

1.2 What is Biodiversity?

'Biodiversity' is short for 'biological diversity'. The Convention on Biological Diversity (United Nations, 1992) defines it as 'the variability among living organisms from all sources ... this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems'. More simply, it means all forms of life, from the largest whale to the smallest fungus and bacterium, together with the web of relationships between them and the habitats they live in. A simpler word for biodiversity might just be 'nature'.

Ireland was one of 168 countries to sign the Convention in 1992, ratifying it in 1996. Article 6 requires each country to develop strategies and plans for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Ireland published its first National Biodiversity Action Plan in 2002, and both Cork City and County Councils published Biodiversity Action Plans in 2009. A local Biodiversity Action Plan such as this one looks at the species and habitats of an area, identifies the issues they face, and sets out what actions are needed, who will carry them out, in what timeframe, and with what resources. Plans should be reviewed every five years.

1.3 Why is Biodiversity Important?

Biodiversity has a value in and of itself, but it is also vitally important to people. Healthy ecosystems provide 'ecosystem services', the direct and indirect contributions of nature to human wellbeing. These are usually grouped into four types:

- Supporting services, the foundations, such as soil formation and nutrient cycling, on which all other services depend.
- Provisioning services, products obtained from nature, such as food, clean water, fuel and materials.
- Regulating services, benefits such as pollination, water purification, flood control, carbon storage and climate regulation.

- Cultural services, the spiritual, recreational, educational and aesthetic benefits people gain from nature.

For a small island community, these services are tangible: clean water, productive farmland, pollination of crops and gardens, natural coastal protection, and a landscape whose beauty and wildlife draw visitors and sustain local businesses. Protecting biodiversity is therefore not separate from the island's economic and social future, it underpins it.

1.4 Threats to Biodiversity

The world is in the throes of a global biodiversity crisis. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has reported that nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history, with the rate of species extinctions accelerating. IPBES identifies five direct drivers of biodiversity loss: changing use of land and sea; direct exploitation of organisms; climate change; pollution; and invasive non-native species. Underlying these are deeper indirect drivers, economic, demographic, institutional and cultural, among them people's growing disconnect from nature and the low value often placed on it.

In Ireland, the same drivers are at work. Of the species assessed here, roughly one in five is threatened with extinction, and one in three of our bee species. The conservation status of one third of habitats protected under the EU Habitats Directive dis-improved between 2007 and 2013. Thirty-seven bird species are of high conservation concern, the Corn Bunting became extinct around the 1990's, and the Corncrake now lingers only in the far west. Anyone who has worked or walked in the countryside over recent decades will attest to a dramatic reduction in insect life.

For Cape Clear and Ballyieragh specifically, the picture is more hopeful than in many places. The area retains a great deal of semi-natural habitat, with generally low-intensity farming and little development. The most pressing local pressures are the abandonment of farmland (leading to bracken and gorse encroachment across valuable heath and grassland), invasive species (both plants such as Montbretia and animals such as rats, feral cats and mink), and the two people-centred drivers, disconnect from, and undervaluing of, nature. This plan is designed around exactly these local realities.

1.5 The Study Area

This Biodiversity Action Plan relates principally to the western part of Cape Clear, the area known as Baile Iarthach (or Ballyieragh), made up of the townlands of Baile Iarthach Thuaidh and Baile Iarthach Theas. This area was chosen for several reasons: it is a manageable size for a thorough habitat survey; the relatively small number of landowners meant access could be arranged; it is large enough to trial biodiversity and agricultural actions at a meaningful scale; and, most importantly, it contains a large proportion of the island's protected habitats and species, including the three main wetlands (East, West and Central Bog) and the island's only lake, Lough Errul (shown as 'Lough Ioral' on the survey maps). Of the 20 landowners in the survey area, 19 engaged directly with the project, granting land access, sharing local knowledge, and being shown the draft findings for their own land. While the survey and actions focus on Ballyieragh, many of the awareness, monitoring and species measures in this plan are intended to benefit the whole island; a farmer engagement event for the wider island is planned for late 2026 to begin involving landowners across the rest of Cape Clear.



The Ballyieragh coastline, Cuas na gCánóg. The study area holds much of the island's share of protected habitats.

2. Biodiversity of Cape Clear

2.1 Protected Sites of Conservation Importance

The Roaringwater Bay and Islands Special Area of Conservation (SAC; site code 000101) covers part of Cape Clear Island, including parts of the Ballyieragh study area. SACs are part of a Europe-wide network of sites designated under the EU Habitats Directive to protect wild habitats and species. The Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC is designated for the following qualifying interests:

- Large shallow inlets and bays
- Reefs
- Vegetated sea cliffs
- Dry heaths
- Sea caves
- Harbour Porpoise
- Otter
- Grey Seal

The boundaries of the SAC overlap with those of the Roaringwater Bay and Islands proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA). Much of the dry heath in Ballyieragh lies within the SAC, and dry heath ([4030] European dry heaths) is one of the qualifying habitats for which the site is designated, giving the heath of the study area particular conservation significance. The wider Roaringwater Bay area, including the seas off Cape Clear, is also of importance for seabirds and marine mammals. Cape Clear itself is not within a Special Protection Area (SPA), but its international ornithological importance, recorded over more than sixty years by the Bird Observatory, is widely recognised.

2.2 Species of Conservation Interest

2.2.1 Birds

From the first visits by a dedicated group of birdwatchers in 1959, Cape Clear Island has maintained an international reputation as a centre for bird migration. The main interest lies in the number and variety of birds that pass through at migration times in spring and autumn, the regular rare birds that turn up, and the large numbers of seabirds that pass offshore. In general the island is not notable for its breeding species, though some have significant populations. Almost every year since 1959 the birds occurring as residents or migrants have been recorded by Bird Observatory staff and visiting birdwatchers, so there is an exceptionally comprehensive understanding of the island's bird life, a knowledge base few communities can match.

Species of particular local conservation interest include the Chough (a red-listed corvid associated with coastal grassland and old buildings), and declining granivorous farmland birds such as Yellowhammer, Linnet, Reed Bunting and Stock Dove, whose fortunes are closely tied to traditional mixed farming and seed-bearing habitats. Coastal and cliff-nesting species, Fulmar, Shag, Peregrine, Raven and Rock Pipit, are also a feature of the study area. Cuas na gCánóg (see photo pg8 above) is a small inlet north of Loch Ioral which name translates as 'Cove of the Shearwater'. Cánóg is an Irish word which includes puffins. A rat eradication project has been initiated with a view to facilitating the return of breeding puffins and shearwaters. That placename suggests that that was a known area for them in earlier times.

2.2.2 Mammals

Cape Clear's terrestrial mammal fauna is limited, as is typical of Irish offshore islands, but its bats and marine mammals are of real significance. Bat surveys (see Section 3) confirm a strong bat community, including Leisler's Bat, a species for which Ireland holds international importance. The Otter, another species of

international importance and a qualifying feature of the SAC, is present around the coast and freshwater. Otters are known to breed in Cape with holt locations known to ecologists along with regular sightings. The surrounding seas are outstanding for cetaceans, with regular Harbour Porpoise, Common and Bottlenose Dolphin, and Minke Whale, and occasional Humpback, Fin and Killer Whale. Grey Seal is regular around the coast.

Several non-native and problem mammals are also present and are a focus of this plan: Brown Rat and feral or semi-feral cats occur at seemingly high densities and are a threat to ground-nesting birds and other wildlife, and American Mink has been recorded. Uncontrolled dogs also present a problem in disturbing or destroying feeding and breeding birds and other animals. There are no foxes. The table in Section 7 lists the mammals recorded on, or plausibly occurring at, Cape Clear.

2.2.3 Vascular Plants

Cape Clear is long associated with birds, but along with the other islands of Roaringwater Bay it is also of great importance for plants. The variety of plant species concentrated in Roaringwater Bay makes it one of the most plant-rich areas in Ireland: some 633 plant species are recorded in the area, with 398 of these found on Cape Clear (Akeroyd, 2020). Cape Clear is described by Akeroyd as a “botanical hotspot”. There is also a notable concentration of rare species.

Plants of conservation concern, those listed on the Flora (Protection) Order 2022 or classified on the Irish Red List as other than 'Least Concern', are listed in Section 7. Species recorded during the recent survey or known from the study area include Chamomile, Marsh-mallow, Allseed, Yellow Bartsia and Chaffweed. Other notable plants include two unusual colour variants (a blue-flowered Scarlet Pimpernel and a pink-flowered Bush Vetch), Musk and Sea Stork's-bill, Bird's-foot and Bird's-foot Clover, and Yellow Centaury, common in Kerry and West Cork but very rare elsewhere in Ireland. Rare arable 'weeds' such as Lesser Snapdragon and Sharp-leaved Fluellen survive on disturbed ground, remnants of the island's tillage past.



Prostrate Willow with Common Dog-violet, a native 'woodland' just 5 cm high, hugging the exposed ground of Ballyieragh.

2.2.4 Invertebrates

The island's invertebrate life is rich and, for several groups, well recorded. At least 25 butterfly species have been noted, including strong populations of species declining nationally, Wall (Red List: Endangered), Grayling and Gatekeeper, together with two small colonies of Green Hairstreak in Ballyieragh (one near the Waist and one near West Bog / Bill) and regular migrants such as Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady and, exceptionally,

Monarch. Monarch butterflies now breed in Spain and Portugal so sighting frequency is increasing. The moths include several red-listed species, among them the Critically Endangered Thrift Clearwing. 50 Thrift Clearwing were recorded in one day when pheromone lure was used. Bees are well represented, with a number of red-listed bumblebees such as the Moss Carder-bee and Large Red-tailed Bumblebee. Dragonflies and damselflies are notably diverse for a small island, over twenty species, reflecting the value of the bogs, lake and ponds. Full lists are given in Section 7.

A selection of Ballyieragh's wildlife



Green Hairstreak, a scarce butterfly



Wall butterfly, plentiful on Cape, though Endangered nationally



Heath Spotted Orchid, regular on the acid heaths



Marsh Mallow, a red-listed medicinal plant, near East Bog



Emperor Dragonfly, one of over twenty dragonfly and damselfly species



Harbour Porpoise and calf, regular in the waters off Cape Clear

2.3 Invasive Species

Invasive non-native species are one of the five global drivers of biodiversity loss and are a live issue on Cape Clear. Among plants, Montbretia is widespread across the Harbour and Cumar areas, Japanese Knotweed is present and a management priority, and species such as New Zealand Pigmyweed, Three-cornered Garlic, Rhododendron and Japanese Rose are present or a risk. The High-Impact New Zealand Flatworm is established. Among animals, Brown Rat, feral cats and American Mink are the principal concerns for native wildlife. Mapping, containing and, where feasible, removing invasive species is a recurring theme in the action plan. A list of recorded and potential invasive species is provided in Section 7.

3. Field Survey and Habitats

3.1 Survey Methods

This plan draws on two strands of evidence: existing records, and new field survey commissioned specifically for it.

Background research made use of the island's remarkable recording history, including 'The Natural History of Cape Clear' by J.T.R. Sharrock (1973) and the updated 'The Natural History of Cape Clear 1959–2019' (2020) by the late Steve Wing, long-term warden at the Bird Observatory, together with the public databases of the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Local residents were consulted and contributed valuable knowledge of wildlife on their land.

The most significant knowledge gap identified was the absence of a baseline habitat map. A thorough walkover habitat survey of the study area was therefore carried out in summer 2025, classifying habitats to the Fossitt (2000) scheme and keeping lists of identifiable plant species throughout, along with incidental records of other wildlife. For safety and access reasons some areas were omitted (steep cliffs and exposed shorelines, the centre of deep bogs, and the lake). Bat detectors were also deployed to record the island's bat community. This survey provides both a starting point for understanding the area and a measurable baseline against which future change can be assessed.



Habitat survey fieldwork in Ballyieragh, summer 2025.

3.2 Habitats of Ballyieragh

The survey recorded a wide range of habitats, classified below using Fossitt codes. Together they form a mosaic of coastal grassland, heath, wetland, bog, lake, farmland, woodland patches and the distinctive stone-wall landscape of the island. Habitat descriptions are grouped by type.

GS1 Dry Calcareous and Neutral Grassland

Found close to cliff edges and shore around the coast of Ballyieragh, where salt and wind strongly shape the vegetation. Typical maritime species include Thrift, Sea and Buck's-horn Plantain, Wild Thyme, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Eyebright, Common Centaury, Sea Stork's-bill and Kidney Vetch, with grasses such as Red Fescue, Sweet Vernal Grass and Yorkshire Fog. Vegetation is often very short from grazing and exposure, with

distinctive low carpets of plantains, and springy Red Fescue mats on ungrazed cliff edges. It grades into heath or acid grassland further from the coast.

GS2 Dry Meadows and Grassy Verges

On roadside verges, field edges and some abandoned fields and gardens. Tussocky grasses (Cock's-foot, False Oat-grass, Yorkshire Fog, Creeping Bent) grow with tall herbs including Wild Angelica, Wild Carrot, Hogweed, Common Knapweed and Nettle. Red Campion grows on verges here, whereas elsewhere it is usually a woodland plant.

GS3 Dry–Humid Acid Grassland

Occurs in a mosaic with dry heath over much of Ballyieragh. Grasses include Common Bent, Yorkshire Fog, Red Fescue and Sweet Vernal Grass, with Heath Bedstraw, Tormentil, Sorrel, Common Dog-violet, Heath Milkwort, Lousewort and others throughout; Bog Pimpernel and Marsh Pennywort in wetter areas. Subject to low-intensity cattle grazing; rocky outcrops carry Sheep's-bit, Sheep's Sorrel and English Stonecrop.

GS4 Wet Grassland

Widespread across Ballyieragh. Grasses include Yorkshire Fog, Creeping Bent and Marsh Foxtail with Sharp-flowered and Smooth Rush. Much is grazed, with low-growing wetland species and abundant Early Marsh Orchids. At Central Bog it is particularly species-rich, grading into marsh with Purple Moor-grass, Marsh Cinquefoil and Common Cottongrass. Wet flushes in coastal grassland are dominated by Silverweed and Common Sedge.

GM1 Marsh

A small patch of marsh at the south end of the Waist, dominated by Watercress.

GA1 Improved Agricultural Grassland

Several fields show signs of fertiliser use and reseeding, though none are Ryegrass monocultures. Yorkshire Fog is most common, with some Perennial Ryegrass and agricultural weeds (Spear Thistle, Docks, Ragwort, Chickweed).

GA2 Amenity Grassland (improved)

Reseeded, highly maintained garden lawns.

HH1 Dry Siliceous Heath

Dominated by low-growing Western Gorse with Bell Heather and Ling, and Tormentil growing through it. This Western Gorse – Bell Heather heath typically grows along cliff tops and lower hill slopes. Most of the heath in Ballyieragh lies within the Roaringwater Bay SAC, and dry heath is a qualifying habitat of the SAC.

HD1 Dense Bracken

Several areas of former farmland are now covered by dense Bracken with Briars and coarse grasses, and Bluebell, Foxglove and Honeysuckle growing through. Bracken is also encroaching from field boundaries elsewhere, a consequence of reduced grazing and a threat to heath and grassland habitats.

PF1 Rich Fen and Flush

A flush within pasture on the north-west coast, trampled by cattle, with Bog Pimpernel, Marsh Pennywort, sedges, Lesser Spearwort and Marsh Orchids, plus Bog St John's-wort, Brookweed, Marsh Arrowgrass, Lesser Water-plantain and Bog Pondweed.

PF2 Poor Fen and Flush

A wet area in heath near O'Driscoll's Castle with standing water, Bog Pondweed, abundant Sphagnum mosses, Common Cottongrass, Marsh Cinquefoil, Bog Asphodel, Royal Fern and Deergrass. Slender Sedge has also been recorded here.

FL2 Oligotrophic Lake

Lough Errul, the only large open water body on Cape Clear. Amphibious Bistort and Shoreweed grow in the lake, with Common Spike-rush and Sharp-flowered Rush at the edge. Circles of stones along the shore were formerly used for washing clothes and retting flax, the lake's 'soft water' was renowned for its cleaning properties. In the lake are 'camógs', amphipod crustaceans, Gammarus duebeni which scavenge skin cells and other 'dirt' and so clean items left in the water for a period of time.

FW4 Drainage Ditches

The ditches draining the bogs are rich habitats: the East Bog channel holds Flag Iris, Creeping Forget-me-not and Marsh Orchids; the Central Bog ditch holds Duckweed, Fool's Watercress, Common Reed and Marsh Cinquefoil; Common Reed grows where the West Bog ditch meets the sea.

FS1 Reed and Large Sedge Swamps

West Bog and East Bog fall into this category. West Bog is diverse, with Common Reed, Common Club-rush, Sphagnum mosses, Marsh Cinquefoil, Ragged Robin, Bog Asphodel and willows. East Bog is dominated by Common Reed with Marsh Cinquefoil, Royal Fern, patches of Ling and Cross-leaved Heath, and an area of Grey Willow.

WD1 / WD3 / WD5 Woodland and Parkland

Small patches of mixed broadleaved woodland (native willows and alder with non-native Sycamore), a few small stands of mature conifer, and a small orchard of apple trees standing in grassland by derelict stone buildings.

WS1 / WS2 / WS3 Scrub and Immature Woodland

Patches of scrub with European Gorse, Bracken and Briars are scattered throughout. Some areas have been planted over recent decades with native Oak, Alder, Holly, Birch and Willow. Abandoned gardens have developed into non-native scrub with Sycamore, Escallonia, Olearia, New Zealand Flax and Montbretia among native Elder, Rowan and Briars.

WL1 Hedgerows

Native hedgerows of willow and hawthorn, and others characterised by non-native Fuchsia and Olearia.

BC2 / BC4 Horticultural Land, Flower Beds and Borders

A new Lavender cultivation venture, a vegetable patch and polytunnel; and ornamental planting including the Bird Observatory Remembrance garden and planting around the old water pump.

BL1 Stone Walls and Other Stonework

The stone field boundaries that are a distinctive part of the Cape Clear landscape, together with unrendered derelict stone buildings. They support many ferns (Hart's-tongue, Maidenhair Spleenwort, Polypody, Black Spleenwort) and plants such as Sheep's-bit, Navelwort and English Stonecrop. Exposed walls in the north-west are densely covered in lichens; others are heavily vegetated and becoming scrubby.

ED2 / ED3 Spoil, Bare and Recolonising Ground

Unsurfaced tracks and bare areas, including ground disturbed by cattle around feeders, sandy patches created by rabbit burrowing around the lake, and areas recovering after past burning.

Coastal and Intertidal Habitats

Though the survey focused on terrestrial habitats, coastal features were mapped, including exposed rocky shores, mixed and shingle shores, rocky sea cliffs (CS1), sea stacks and islets (CS2), sea walls and piers (CC1), shingle banks (CB1) and exposed siliceous rock (ER1). Cliffs and stacks were not surveyed directly due to access, but are recognised nationally through the Irish Sea Cliff survey (Barron et al., 2011).



The network of dry-stone walls (habitat BL1) across the Ballyieragh landscape, a defining cultural and ecological feature of the island.



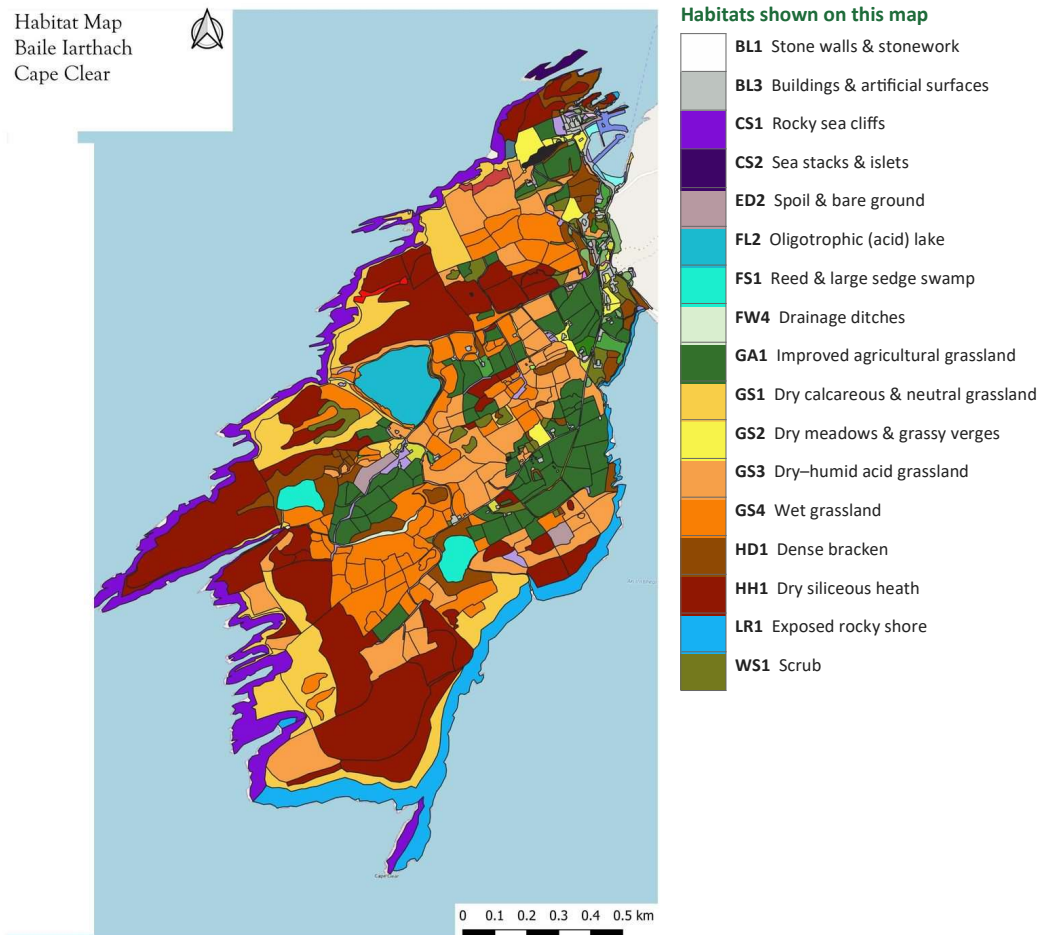
Dry-stone walls support ferns, flowering plants and rich lichen communities.



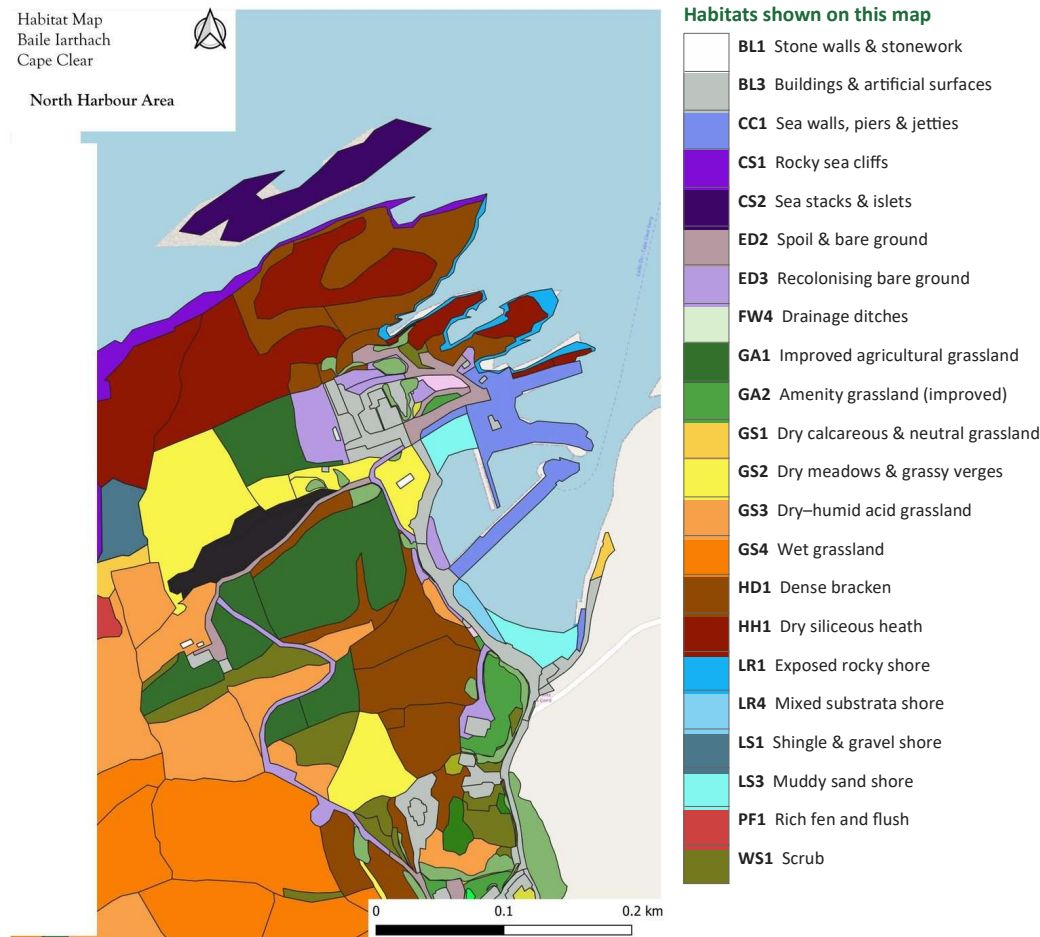
Lichen-covered stone in the exposed north-west of Ballyieragh.

3.3 Habitat Map

The habitat survey was compiled into a set of maps covering the Ballyieragh study area, classified to Fossitt habitat types. These are the central output of the survey and provide the baseline for monitoring change over the life of this plan and beyond. Habitat maps 1–7 are shown first, each with its own key listing only the habitats that appear on that map (colours and codes follow Fossitt, 2000). Four further thematic maps, stone walls, invasive species, bat-detector locations and SAC extent, then follow, each with its own key.



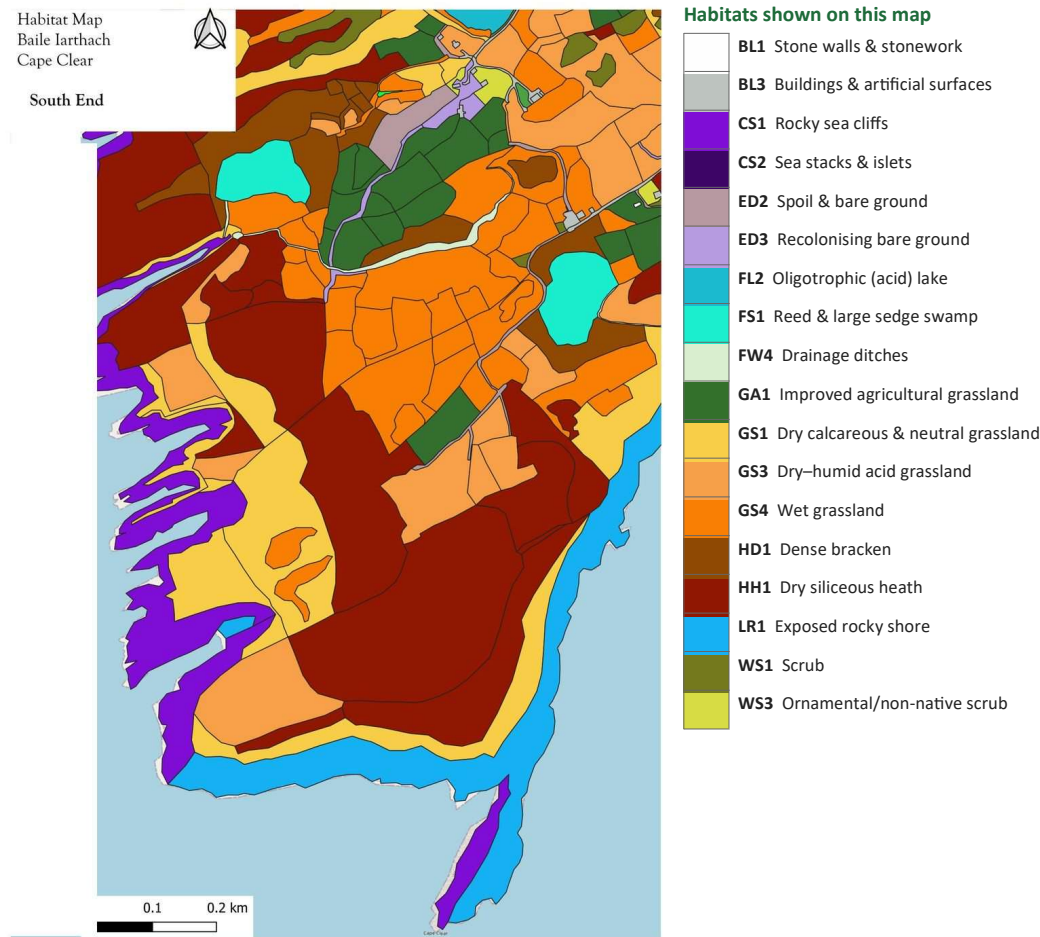
Habitat map 1, Baile Iarthach overview, Cape Clear (Fossitt classification, 2025 survey).



Habitat map 2, North Harbour area.



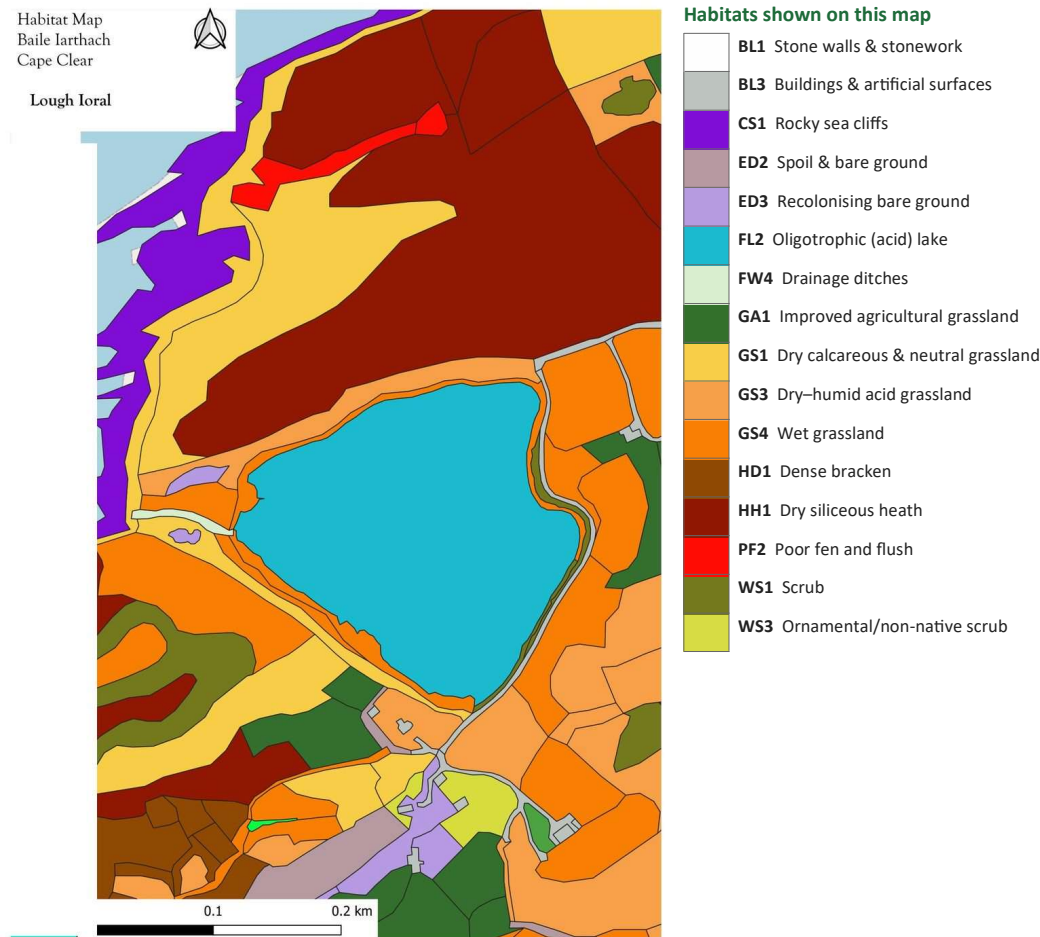
Habitat map 3, Cumar.



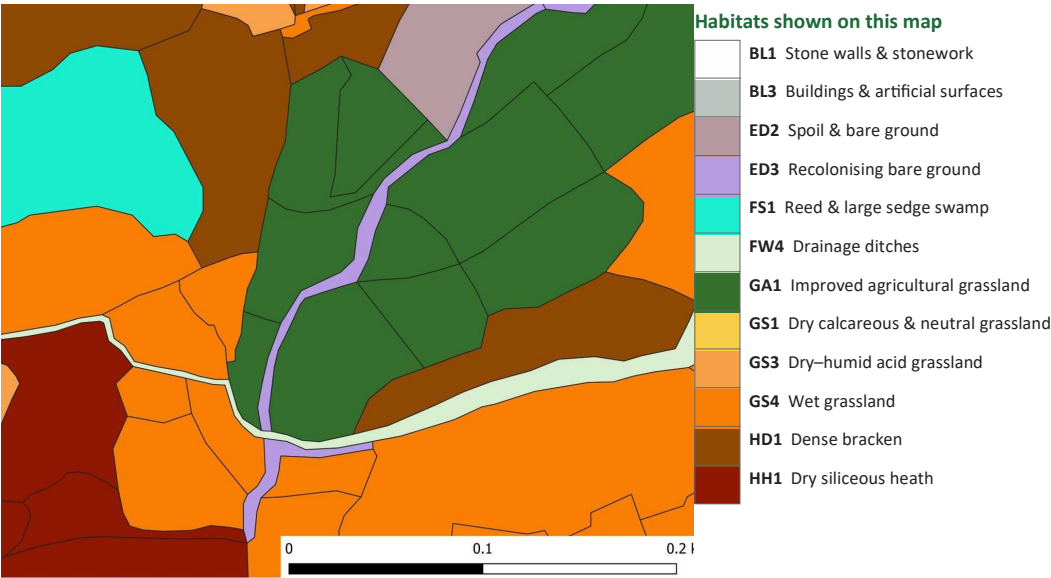
Habitat map 4, South End.



Habitat map 5, Bogs and Lake.



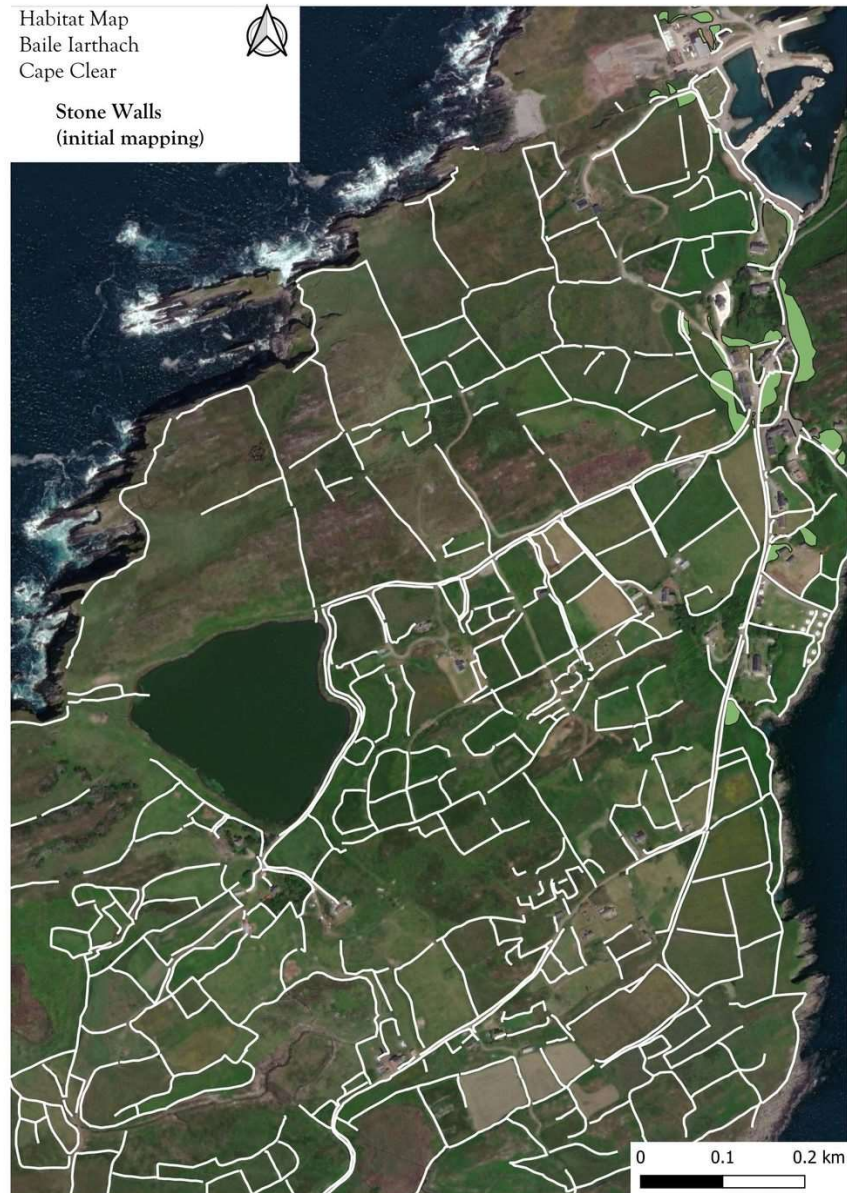
Habitat map 6, Lough Errul (Lough Ioral).



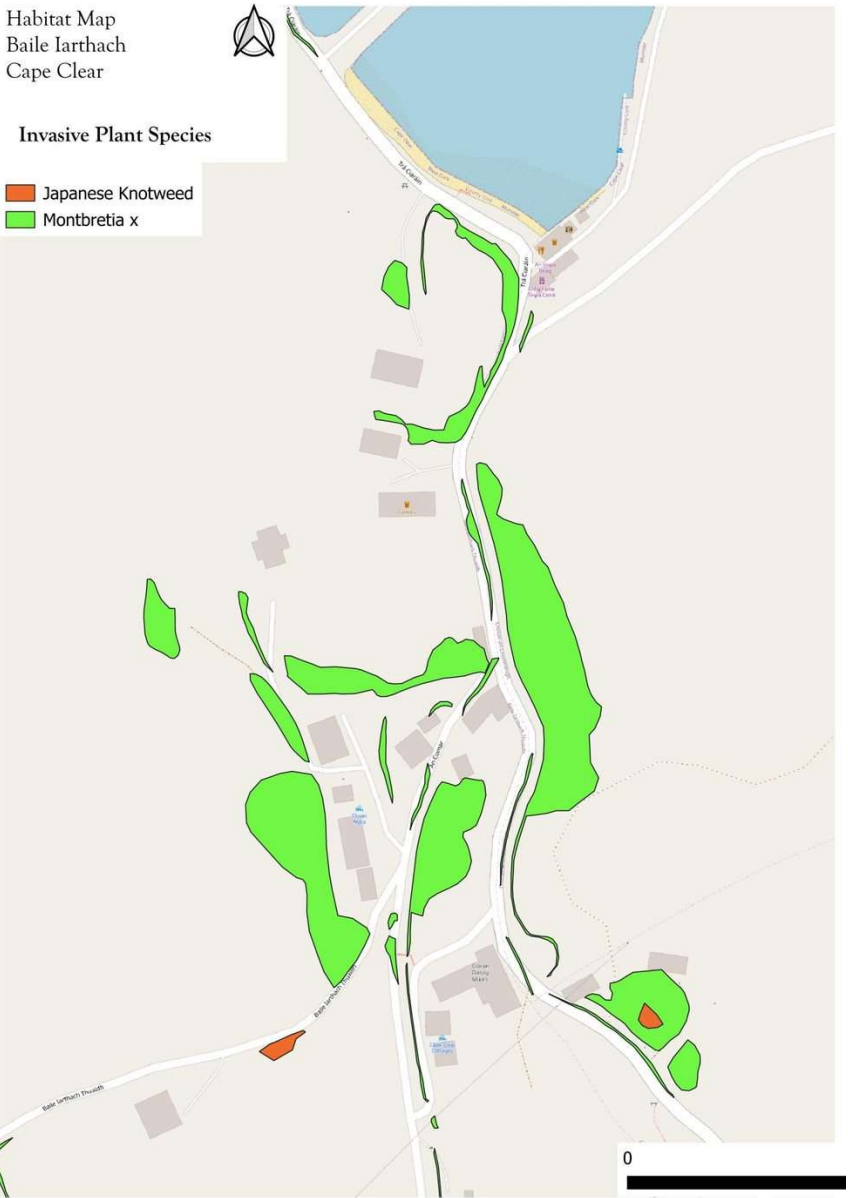
Habitat map 7, West Bog & Central Bog.

Thematic maps

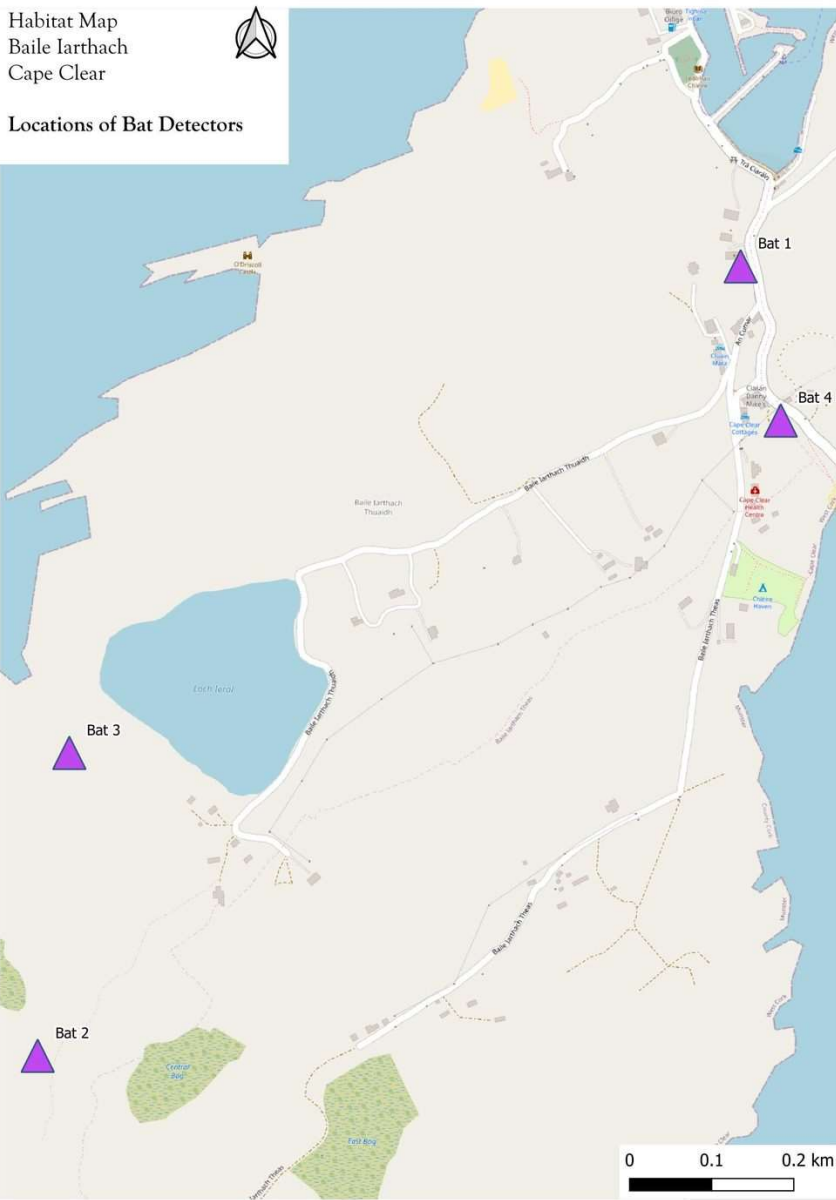
Alongside the Fossitt habitat maps, the survey and community work produced several thematic maps: the initial mapping of the island's dry-stone walls on satellite imagery, the recorded locations of the main invasive plant species, the positions of the bat detectors, and the extent of the Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC within the study area. Each of these carries its own key.



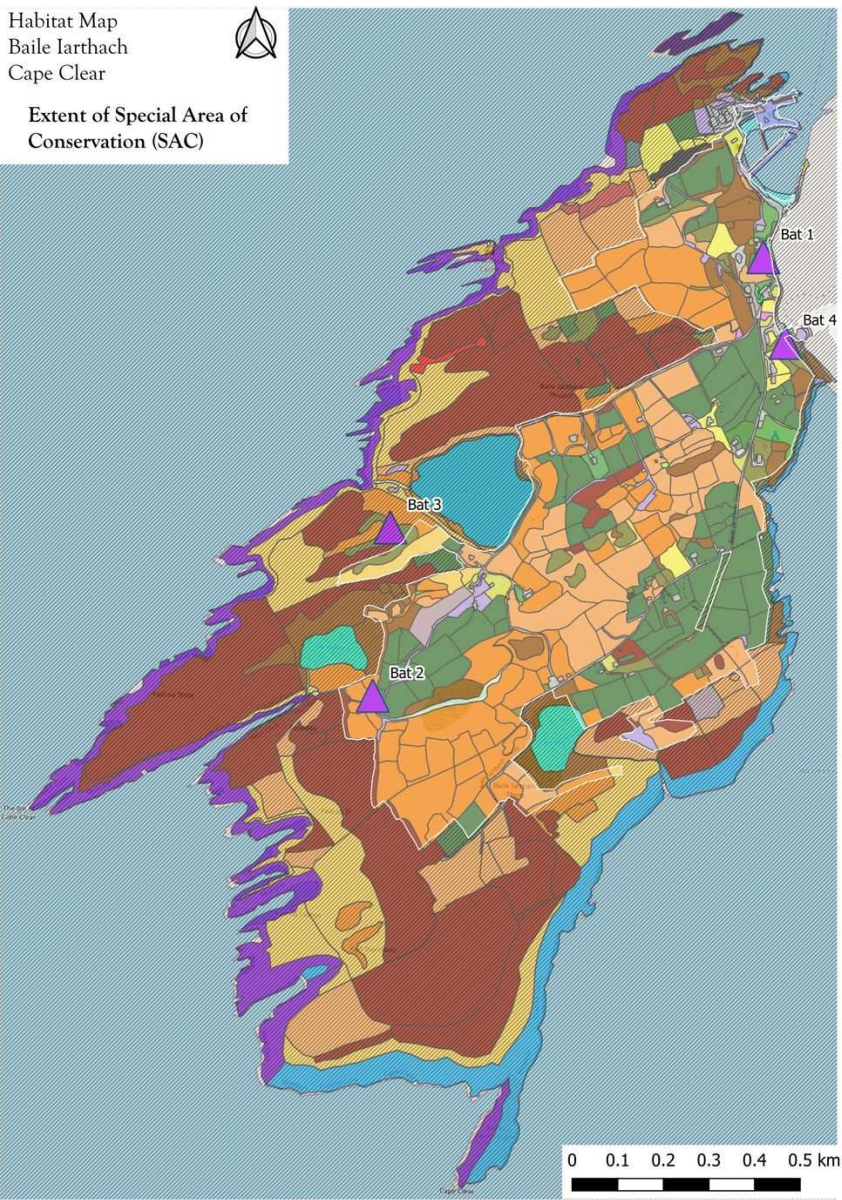
Stone walls, initial mapping on satellite imagery, Ballyieragh.



Invasive plant species, recorded locations of Japanese Knotweed (orange) and Montbretia (green).



Locations of the four bat detectors deployed in summer 2025.



Extent of the Roaringwater Bay & Islands SAC within the study area, shown over the habitat mapping.

3.4 Bat Survey Results

Four static bat detectors were deployed across the study area in summer 2025, at Cotters, West Bog, the Lake and Nordywood, recording over a total of 66 detector-nights between June and August. Five bat species were confirmed. Common and Soprano Pipistrelle and Leisler's Bat were frequent across most detectors; Nathusius's Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared Bat were also recorded. Leisler's Bat is a species for which Ireland holds international importance, making its strong presence here especially noteworthy. Bat activity across the bogs and lake underlines the value of these wetland habitats as foraging areas, and continued bat monitoring is included as an action in this plan.

Detector	Location	Recording period	Nights
Det 1	Cotters	9–25 June 2025	16
Det 2	West Bog	7–20 June 2025	13
Det 3	Lake	29 July–15 Aug 2025	18
Det 4	Nordywood	29 July–16 Aug 2025	19

Species	Status	Summary of activity
Leisler's Bat	Least Concern (Intl. importance)	Frequent at all four detectors
Common Pipistrelle	Least Concern	Frequent at all four detectors
Soprano Pipistrelle	Least Concern	Frequent at West Bog and Lake
Nathusius's Pipistrelle	Least Concern	Occasional at all detectors
Brown Long-eared Bat	Least Concern	Frequent at the Lake; likely at Nordywood



A static bat detector deployed in the West Bog.

4. Issues and Priorities: SWOT Analysis

Having reviewed the biodiversity of Ballyieragh, we can form a view of the issues to be addressed and the priorities for action. A simple SWOT analysis, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, helps to structure this thinking and to tailor a response to the island's specific situation.

Strengths

- Relatively undisturbed location
- Generally non-intensive farming practices
- Significant national profile as a wildlife (bird) destination
- Significant non-wildlife tourism
- Engaged community with cultural and historical connections to wildlife
- Many habitats remain semi-natural

Weaknesses

- Abandonment of habitats
- Low local engagement at times
- Restricted land access
- A community that can be fragmented
- Seemingly high populations of rats and feral or semi-feral cats
- Seemingly increasing invasive plant communities

Opportunities

- Capitalise on the island's existing reputation for wildlife
- Increased education with potential for wide reach
- Biodiversity enhancement supporting local community facilities
- Reputational benefit of 'biodiversity' to tourism
- Developing community cohesion around a positive common purpose
- New income sources for islanders (e.g. cottage industries)
- Broadening the tourist season and offering wildlife events for families and visitors
- Maximising farm payments while benefiting biodiversity through wildlife-friendly farming

Threats

- Poaching of ground by livestock
- Continued land abandonment
- Reduced or poorly designed farm payments
- Increased footfall damaging habitats or species
- Disturbance of livestock
- Reduced privacy for residents

5. The Biodiversity Action Plan

Our vision

That the people of Cape Clear understand, value and actively care for the island's natural heritage, so that the habitats of Ballyieragh, from its bogs and lake to its heaths, stone walls and coast, are in as good or better condition at the end of this plan than at its start, and Cape Clear becomes a flagship example of community-led biodiversity enhancement that also supports island life and livelihoods.

5.1 How these actions were developed

The actions in this plan were developed from three sources working together: the findings of the 2025 habitat and bat survey; the extensive existing species knowledge for the island; and the priorities, local knowledge and ideas of the Tograí Chléire committee, island landowners and community. Rather than being handed down, the final set of actions was agreed within the community, so that responsibility and enthusiasm for them is genuinely local. The plan is organised under four objectives.

- Objective 1, Making Cape Clear biodiversity-friendly: making more room for nature in the way public and private land is managed.
- Objective 2, Raising awareness of the island's biodiversity and how to preserve and enhance it.
- Objective 3, Collecting evidence to track change over time and measure the effectiveness of actions.
- Objective 4, Implementing species- and habitat-specific measures.

This is a working plan, intended to be revisited and refined by Tograí Chléire as circumstances, resources and opportunities change. Not everything can be done at once; actions are prioritised (High / Medium / Low) and given an indicative timeframe over the 2026–2031 period. 'Lead' indicates who is best placed to drive an action, though most depend on partnership between the community, landowners, Cork County Council and specialist bodies.

5.2 General principles to follow

- First, do no harm, make sure that efforts to help nature do not inadvertently damage it (for example, by spreading invasive species or disturbing sensitive habitats or breeding birds).
- Use plants of local or regional provenance where possible, suited to soil and conditions, and valuable to pollinators and wildlife.
- Minimise and, in public areas, phase out the use of general herbicides such as glyphosate, except under professional guidance for controlling specific invasive species.
- Delay cutting of verges and grassland as long as practical in spring, keep mowing frequency low, and complete hedge and tree safety work within the legal period.
- Respect landowner privacy, livestock and land access at all times; agree management with those directly affected.
- Use discreet signage to explain what is being done and why, building understanding and local pride.

5.3 Objective 1, Making Cape Clear biodiversity-friendly

1.1 Managing public spaces for biodiversity

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
1.1.1	Wildlife-friendly planting at the grotto, using local-provenance, pollinator-friendly species	Medium	Yr 1–2	Tograí Chléire
1.1.2	Manage roadside verges and the graveyard for pollinators: map and number all road sections, agree a management prescription for each, reduce mowing and end general herbicide use	High	Yr 1–3, ongoing	Tograí Chléire, Cork Co. Council, landowners

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
1.1.3	Regular litter-picking events along verges and foreshore, with a nominated coordinator and shared equipment	Medium	Ongoing	Tograí Chléire, community; Council removes collected litter
1.1.4	Map, contain and remove invasive plants (Montbretia, Japanese Knotweed, etc.). Trial an eco-friendly vinegar-based biocide on Japanese Knotweed at selected test sites, commencing autumn (most effective then)	High	Yr 1–5 (trial Yr 1)	Tograí Chléire, NPWS/Council advice

1.2 Managing private land for biodiversity

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
1.2.1	Wildlife-friendly planting at pubs, shop, houses and campsite	Medium	Yr 1–3	Businesses, residents, Tograí Chléire
1.2.2	Sow autumn and winter food crops for wild birds on suitable land	Medium	Yr 2–4	Farmers, Tograí Chléire
1.2.3	Create new ponds and wetlands on suitable private land (building on Heritage Keepers ponds)	High	Yr 2–4	Landowners, Tograí Chléire, LAWPRO
1.2.4	Rewetting of drained wetlands / bogs as a conservation and carbon measure, subject to landowner agreement and feasibility	High	Yr 2–5	Landowners, NPWS, Tograí Chléire
1.2.5	Bracken management to protect encroached heath and grassland, restoring habitat and land value	High	Yr 1–5	Farmers, Tograí Chléire
1.2.6	Improve the water quality of Lough Errul (algal problem), pilot using native water lilies; LAWPRO funding applied for	High	Yr 1–3	Tograí Chléire, LAWPRO
1.2.7	Create a conservation feature of open water areas through reeds with viewpoint for scientists, ecologists	Medium	Yr 1–3	Tograí Chléire, Landowners, NPWS

5.4 Objective 2, Raising awareness

2.1 Awareness among visitors

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
2.1.1	Public biodiversity events on the island (building on the 2025 and 2026 biodiversity conferences)	High	Annual	Tograí Chléire
2.1.2	Develop walking trails with scannable QR codes and leaflets on local wildlife and habitats esp through and around the bogs.	Medium	Yr 2–4	Tograí Chléire, Farmers, Council, Fáilte Ireland
2.1.3	Information for ferry passengers on marine mammals and seabirds; interpretive signage for the harbour	Medium	Yr 2–3	Tograí Chléire, ferry operators
2.1.4	Low-water engineering features (rockpool / living seawall)	Low	Yr 3–5	Tograí Chléire, Council,

2.2 Awareness among the local community

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
2.2.1	Regular local newsletter / updates on island biodiversity and the plan's progress	Medium	Ongoing	Tograí Chléire
2.2.2	Wildlife-friendly gardening information events	Medium	Annual	Tograí Chléire
2.2.3	Raise awareness of the impact of cats on wildlife, discuss a neutering programme & carry out.	High	Yr 1–2	Tograí Chléire, vets, residents
2.2.4	Involve landowners and the farming community directly in habitat and species management	High	Ongoing	Tograí Chléire, farmers
2.2.5	Explore a live camera feed (bats/birds/otters) and a	Low	Yr 3–5	Tograí Chléire

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
	sea-watching hide/shelter			

2.3 Awareness among local businesses

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
2.3.1	Marine mammal and seabird identification workshop for ferry staff, kayak instructors and tourism operators, including an ethical approach to wildlife	Medium	Yr 2	Tograí Chléire, IWDG, BirdWatch Ireland

2.4 Wildlife-friendly farming

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
2.4.1	Annual 'farming for nature' information event covering ACRES and other schemes, with a Teagasc adviser. A farmer engagement event for the wider island is planned for late 2026	High	Annual; next late 2026	Tograí Chléire, Teagasc, farmers



Landowner consultation in Baile Iarthach, sharing survey findings and discussing future actions on the ground.

5.5 Objective 3, Collecting evidence and monitoring

3.1 Collect evidence on the current state of biodiversity

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
3.1.1	Habitat map produced as part of this plan (completed 2025), maintain and share as the baseline	High	Done / ongoing	Tograí Chléire
3.1.2	Baseline surveys at any sites proposed for pond/wetland creation	Medium	Before works	Ecologist, Tograí Chléire
3.1.3	Map the location of invasive plant species across the study area	High	Yr 1–2	Tograí Chléire
3.1.4	Continued bat monitoring, building on the 2025 detector survey	Medium	Periodic	Tograí Chléire, Bat Conservation Ireland

3.2 Measure changes over time

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
3.2.1	Local participation in national monitoring schemes (butterfly, bumblebee, rare plants, etc.)	Medium	Ongoing	Community, NBDC
3.2.2	Hold a Bioblitz towards the end of the plan period	Medium	Yr 5	Tograí Chléire, NBDC
3.2.3	Re-examine invasive plant locations at end of plan to measure change	Medium	Yr 5	Tograí Chléire

5.6 Objective 4, Species and habitat measures

4.1 Species groups and habitats

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
4.1.1	Protect and enhance SAC habitats, especially dry heath, from bracken/gorse encroachment and damage	High	Ongoing	Landowners, NPWS, Tograí Chléire
4.1.2	Install bat boxes / retain roost features in buildings	Low	Yr 2–4	Tograí Chléire
4.1.3	Targeted measures for declining butterflies (Green Hairstreak, Wall, Grayling, Gatekeeper) through heath and grassland management	Medium	Yr 2–5	Tograí Chléire

4.2 Individual species

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Lead & partners
4.2.1	Conserve known sites for Lanceolate Spleenwort and other rare plants	Medium	Yr 2–5	Tograí Chléire, NPWS
4.2.2	Rat-eradication feasibility project, a DNA study comparing Cape Clear and Sherkin rat populations is underway to assess inter-island movement; advisers from the world-first successful Rathlin Island eradication have visited and agreed to support with information and connections	High	Yr 1–3	Tograí Chléire, NPWS, Rathlin advisers
4.2.3	Survey for, and control, American Mink	Medium	Yr 2–4	Tograí Chléire, NPWS
4.2.4	Catch-Neuter-Release programme for island cats (pet and feral)	High	Yr 1–3	Tograí Chléire, vets, residents
4.2.5	Otter holt / washing pools / screen or hide; protect Chough nesting areas; control feral pigeons at problem sites	Low–Med	Yr 2–5	Tograí Chléire, NPWS
4.2.6	Explore management for Corncrake and hay-meadow creation, linked to the oat-cultivation proposal (Appendix 1)	Medium	Yr 2–5	Farmers, Tograí Chléire, BirdWatch Ireland

5.7 Monitoring and Review

Delivery of this plan will be led and coordinated by Tograí Chléire. Progress against the actions will be reviewed by the committee at least once a year, recording what has been achieved and updating the priority and timeframe of each action as circumstances, resources and opportunities change. The habitat map, species lists and invasive-species locations produced for this plan form the baseline against which change will be measured, and the monitoring actions under Objective 3, participation in national recording schemes, continued bat monitoring, a Bioblitz, and a re-survey of invasive species towards the end of the period, are the main tools for tracking it. A fuller review will be carried out at the end of the plan period in 2031 to assess what has been delivered, capture lessons learned and prepare a successor plan. In keeping with good practice, this Biodiversity Action Plan should be treated as a living document and revised as new information and opportunities arise.

Key indicators

Progress will be judged against a small set of practical indicators rather than a long list of targets, in keeping with the resources of a small voluntary group:

Indicator	How it will be measured / target
Habitat baseline maintained	Habitat map and species lists kept current; a full habitat re-survey completed by 2031
Invasive species controlled	Invasive plants mapped (Yr 1–2); Japanese Knotweed test sites treated and monitored; Montbretia reduced at priority sites

Indicator	How it will be measured / target
Farmer engagement	Number of landowners engaging with ACRES and farming-for-nature events (19 of 20 survey-area farmers already engaged)
Habitat restoration	Number of ponds/wetlands created; area of bog rewetted; area of bracken managed
Freshwater quality	Lough Errul water-quality pilot established and monitored
Bats and wildlife	Bat activity monitored and maintained; rat-eradication feasibility completed; cats neutered under a CNR programme
Community involvement	Number of public events and attendance; school sessions held; records submitted to the NBDC
End-of-plan review	Bioblitz held and a full review of the plan completed in 2031

6. Funding and Resources

Delivering these actions will require a mix of volunteer effort, community fundraising and external grants. Many potential sources exist; the completed plan itself is an important tool for making the case in funding applications. The main options are summarised below.

6.1 Public funding sources

Government and agency schemes relevant to this plan include: NPWS Local Biodiversity Action Fund, the Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme and NPWS small-recording grants; Community Foundation Ireland; the Heritage Council (Community Heritage Grant; Traditional Farm Buildings Grant, which can fund stone-wall repair); the Irish Pollinator Initiative; LAWPRO's Community Water Development Fund for water-related projects; the LEADER Programme (rural tourism and recreation, enterprise, food, community); Local Enterprise Office priming grants; Cork County Council schemes (Community Environment Action Fund, Local Enhancement Programme, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure, Amenity Grants); the CLÁR Programme, Town and Village Renewal, and Tidy Towns prizes; Teagasc's Native Woodland scheme; and Údarás na Gaeltachta community schemes. Larger interventions such as rat eradication may require direct NPWS involvement and funding.

6.2 Private and philanthropic sources

Options include direct sponsorship of events or actions; commercial sponsorship of individual paddocks or schemes; sponsorship from ecology-related consultancies; an in-house fundraising pool; private foundations (such as Lush, Hometree, Patagonia and Praeger Grants in Natural History); and affordable loans for community groups through Clann Credo.

6.3 Grants for private farmland

Agri-environment schemes are central to delivering biodiversity gains on farmland while supporting farm incomes, principally CAP/ACRES and the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme. A recurring theme of this plan is helping farmers to access these schemes using the ecological data now available for their land, supported by Teagasc advice. Organic schemes (Organic Farming Scheme, Organic Capital Investment and Processing schemes) are directly relevant to the oat-cultivation proposal in Appendix 1.

6.4 Socially and culturally focused funding

Because Cape Clear is a Gaeltacht island, additional funding streams support culturally and socially focused activity: the Shared Island Initiative, Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Events and Festivals grants, the Creative Ireland programme, Pobal's Rural Social Scheme, The Ireland Funds, Rethink Ireland, and Gael Linn. Inter-island information-sharing and cultural crossover events, nationally or internationally, are a natural fit for these.

7. Species Lists

The following lists draw together records from the 2025 survey and the island's long recording history (Bird Observatory, NBDC, NPWS and published sources). They are working lists and will be added to over time. Conservation status refers to the relevant Irish Red List or, for plants, the Flora (Protection) Order 2022; species marked with '?' in the 'Recorded' column are of uncertain or unconfirmed occurrence.

7.1 Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	Status	Notes
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>	,	Regular migrant
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	,	Resident
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Argynnis aglaja</i>	Vulnerable	Likes dry heath
Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	Near Threatened	Resident
Grayling	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>	Near Threatened	Sea cliffs and dry heath
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>	,	2 small colonies in Ballyieragh
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>	,	Resident
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	,	Around ivy, North Harbour
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	,	Resident
Marsh Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	Vulnerable	Old West Bog records; not for decades
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	,	Resident
Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	,	Resident
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	,	Migrant
Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>	,	Resident
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	,	Migrant
Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	,	Resident
Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	Endangered	Some records, uncertain
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	,	Resident
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	Near Threatened	Resident
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	,	Resident
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	,	1st for Cape, Oct 2019
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	,	Resident
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	,	Resident
Wall	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	Endangered	Resident; sea cliffs and dry heath
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	,	Occasional, breeds Spain & Portugal now

7.2 Moths (Red-listed species recorded)

Common name	Scientific name	Status
Black-banded	<i>Polymixis xanthomista</i>	Vulnerable
Dotted Rustic	<i>Rhyacia simulans</i>	Vulnerable
Forester	<i>Adscita statices</i>	Endangered
Mouse Moth	<i>Amphipyra tragopoginis</i>	Near Threatened
Thrift Clearwing	<i>Pyropteron muscaeformis</i>	Critically Endangered
Webb's Wainscot	<i>Globia sparganii</i>	Vulnerable
Yellow Shell	<i>Camptogramma bilineata</i>	Near Threatened

7.3 Bees

Red-listed bees recorded include the Northern White-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus magnus*, Data Deficient), Hill Cuckoo Bee (*B. rupestris*, Endangered), Large Red-tailed Bumblebee (*B. lapidarius*, Near Threatened), Willughby's Leafcutter Bee (*Megachile willughbiella*, Near Threatened), Moss Carder-bee (*B. muscorum*, Near Threatened), Field Cuckoo Bee (*B. campestris*, Vulnerable) and Red-tailed Carder Bee (*B. ruderarius*, Vulnerable). Other bumblebees present include Garden, Common Carder, White-tailed, Heath and Large Carder Bee, among others.

7.4 Dragonflies and Damselflies

Common name	Scientific name	Status	Cape
Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>	Least Concern	Y (2016)
Scarce Emerald Spreadwing	<i>Lestes dryas</i>	Near Threatened	?
Common Emerald Spreadwing	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>	Least Concern	?
Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	Least Concern	Y
Variable Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion pulchellum</i>	Least Concern	Y
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>	Least Concern	Y
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	Least Concern	Y
Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura pumilio</i>	Vulnerable	?
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>	Least Concern	Y
Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	Vagrant	Y
Common Hawker	<i>Aeshna juncea</i>	Least Concern	Y
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	Least Concern	Y
Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>	Least Concern	Y
Hairy Hawker	<i>Brachytron pratense</i>	Least Concern	Y
Vagrant Emperor	<i>Hemianax ephippiger</i>	Vagrant	Y (2017)
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	Least Concern	Y
Keeled Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>	Least Concern	Y (2016)
Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>	Vagrant	Y
Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>	Least Concern	Y
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	Least Concern	Y

Additional species recorded as uncertain/vagrant: Brown Hawker, Lesser Emperor, Black-tailed Skimmer and Black Darter.

7.5 Mammals (including bats)

Common name	Scientific name	Status	Recorded
Pygmy Shrew	<i>Sorex minutus</i>	Least Concern	Y
Greater White-toothed Shrew	<i>Crocidura russula</i>	,	?
Daubenton's Bat	<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>	Least Concern	Y (lake, 2010)
Leisler's Bat	<i>Nyctalus leisleri</i>	Least Concern (Intl.)	Y
Nathusius's Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus nathusii</i>	Least Concern	Y
Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	Least Concern	Y
Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	Least Concern	Y
Brown Long-eared Bat	<i>Plecotus auritus</i>	Least Concern	Y
Field Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	Least Concern	Y
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	,	Y (abundant)
Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	Least Concern (Intl.)	Y
American Mink	<i>Neovison vison</i>	Non-native	Y

Common name	Scientific name	Status	Recorded
Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus	Least Concern	Y
Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus	Non-native	Y

Other species possible/unconfirmed: Whiskered, Natterer's and Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Bank Vole, Harbour Seal. Common Named Field Mouse is actually Wood Mouse. There are no Field mice in Ireland. Confirmed sighting of one deer.

7.6 Cetaceans recorded off Cape Clear

Confirmed records include Minke Whale, Fin Whale, Humpback Whale, Harbour Porpoise, Risso's Dolphin, Bottlenose Dolphin, Common Dolphin and Killer Whale. Further species recorded as uncertain include Sei, Blue and Sperm Whale, White-beaked and Atlantic White-sided Dolphin, Striped Dolphin, False Killer, Long-finned Pilot, Sowerby's and Cuvier's Beaked Whale and Northern Bottlenose Whale. The waters off Cape Clear are among the best in Ireland for whale and dolphin watching.

7.7 Reptiles, Amphibians and Notable Marine Species

Viviparous (Common) Lizard is plentiful throughout Ballyieragh, and Common Frog (one record, prob introduced) has been recorded in the East Bog / Central Bog area. Critically Endangered European Eel has been recorded in a ditch on the lighthouse road and recorded on several occasions in freshwater streams and wells and once crossing a road on a wet day. The surrounding seas host occasional records of Basking Shark (Endangered), Ocean Sunfish, Bluefin Tuna and several turtle and shark species, though these marine records are anecdotal and should be treated as preliminary.

7.8 Plants of Conservation Concern (Flora Protection Order / Red List)

Common name	Scientific name	Status	Recorded / notes
Hairy Bird's-foot Trefoil	Lotus subbiflorus	FPO 2022; Near Threatened	Near the Waist, prob in Baile Iarthach
Lesser Snapdragon	Misopates orontium	Endangered	No NBDC records west of Inniscarra
Pale Dog-violet	Viola lactea	FPO 2022; Vulnerable	Last recorded on Cape 1960
Lanceolate Spleenwort	Asplenium obovatum	FPO 2022; Vulnerable	Low Road, North Harbour; not seen for years
Wormwood	Artemisia absinthium	Vulnerable	NBDC records Skeams and Sherkin
Autumn Lady's-tresses	Spiranthes spiralis	Near Threatened	Known near the lake (?)
Slender Centaury	Centaureum pulchellum	FPO 2022	Last recorded on Cape 1898
Allseed	Radiola linoides	Near Threatened	2016 Bioblitz, Ballyieragh dry heath
Chaffweed	Anagallis minima	Near Threatened	2016 Bioblitz, Ballyieragh
Chamomile	Chamaemelum nobile	Near Threatened	Present, Central Bog area (recorded)
Corn Marigold	Glebionis segetum	Near Threatened	2016 Bioblitz, Ballyieragh
Green-winged Orchid	Anacamptis morio	Vulnerable	2021, not in Ballyieragh
Marsh-mallow	Althaea officinalis	Near Threatened	Present near East Bog (recorded)
Prostrate Broom	Cytisus scoparius maritimus	Vulnerable	BSBI 2000–2010, probably Ballyieragh
Yellow Bartsia	Parentucellia viscosa	Near Threatened	2016 Bioblitz, Ballyieragh (recorded)

7.9 Invasive and Non-native Species

Common name	Scientific name	Status / impact
New Zealand Flatworm	<i>Arthurdendyus triangulatus</i>	High-impact invasive
Flatworm	<i>Kontikia ventrolineata</i>	Medium-impact invasive
New Zealand Pigmyweed	<i>Crassula helmsii</i>	Regulated invasive (EU/Ireland), high risk
Japanese Knotweed	<i>Fallopia japonica</i>	Regulated invasive (EU/Ireland), high risk
Butterfly-bush	<i>Buddleja davidii</i>	Medium-impact invasive
Japanese Rose	<i>Rosa rugosa</i>	Medium-impact invasive
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Medium-impact invasive
Rhododendron	<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>	Regulated invasive (Ireland), high risk
Three-cornered Garlic	<i>Allium triquetrum</i>	Regulated invasive (Ireland), moderate risk
Brazilian Giant-rhubarb	<i>Gunnera manicata</i>	Regulated invasive (Ireland)
Harlequin Ladybird	<i>Harmonia axyridis</i>	Regulated invasive (Ireland), high risk
Montbretia	<i>Crocasmia x crocosmiiflora</i>	Widespread; garden escape (Harbour/Cumar)

8. References and Further Information

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Useful contacts

Cork County Council Biodiversity Officer; National Parks and Wildlife Service (West Cork Conservation Ranger); Teagasc (ACRES/farm advisory); BirdWatch Ireland and the Cape Clear Bird Observatory; Bat Conservation Ireland; the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG); the National Biodiversity Data Centre; and the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO).

Acknowledgements

Tograí Chléire is grateful to everyone who contributed to this plan: the farmers and landowners of Baile Iarthach, who gave access to their land and shared their knowledge; the staff and volunteers of the Cape Clear Bird Observatory and BirdWatch Ireland; Wildeye Ltd. for the ecological survey and fieldwork; the Teagasc advisory service; and the many island residents and young people who took part in the surveys, conferences and events. This plan was made possible by the support of Community Foundation Ireland, in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, through the Biodiversity Fund 2024.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1, Restoring Organic Oat Cultivation as an Island Industry

Summary of a proposal by Tony Nagle (2025), included as a distinctive, island-specific action that links biodiversity, farming, culture and rural livelihoods.

The restoration of organic grain cultivation on Cape Clear, if properly coordinated, offers enduring economic, cultural and ecological benefits. Organic oats are a valuable, low-input cash crop well suited to the island's mild climate, and demand for certified organic oats currently outstrips supply in Ireland (organic milling oats have recently fetched around €415/tonne at farm gate, roughly double conventional prices). A local cottage industry, artisan breads, oatcakes, oat milk and stone-ground oatmeal, could add substantial value through direct sales, workshops, farm tours and heritage food festivals, attracting visitors and deepening community engagement.

Ecologically, restoring a traditional mixed-farming landscape would directly benefit several declining granivorous birds, Greenfinch, Linnet, Reed Bunting. It might also attract non-breeding Yellowhammer and Stock Dove, and, through increased insect abundance, migrant and breeding birds more widely. Conservation margins and hedgerows alongside oat fields would amplify habitat value and support pollinators, while more small birds and mammals would benefit birds of prey such as Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine and Hen Harrier. Restoring cultivation on land now colonised by bracken would also reverse habitat abandonment.

The proposal envisages a phased approach: farmer training, access to organic certification support, and shared, low-cost processing (portable electric mills cost roughly €167–€400). Cultivation can start on small parcels of 1–2 acres; if three to six farmers pooled resources and equipment, the transition could be achieved relatively easily, supported by the Organic Farming, Organic Capital Investment and Organic Processing schemes. This action is cross-referenced at 4.2.6 in the action plan.

Appendix 2, Relevant Legislation

Key legislation and designations underpinning this plan include: the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), which provide for Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas; the EU Invasive Alien Species Regulation (No. 1143/2014); the Wildlife Acts 1976–2018; the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477/2011, as amended by S.I. 374/2024); and the Flora (Protection) Order 2022, which makes it an offence to damage listed plant species or their habitats without licence. The Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC and pNHA are the principal designations affecting the study area.

Appendix 3, Land Ownership and Approvals

Almost all of the study area is in private ownership. No action affecting private land should proceed without the agreement of the landowner concerned, and works within or adjacent to the Roaringwater Bay and Islands SAC may require screening for Appropriate Assessment and, in some cases, consent or licence from NPWS. Works affecting watercourses, protected species or protected structures may require additional consents. Early, respectful engagement with landowners and the relevant authorities is built into the action plan as a matter of principle.

Appendix 4, About Tograí Chléire

Tograí Chléire is a community heritage, culture and environment group on Cape Clear Island, Ireland's most southerly offshore island. A registered charity (RCN 20206780), its explicit aim is to facilitate community

projects in biodiversity, sustainability, heritage and culture. It is a group of more than twelve island residents and is the only such group on the island.

Alongside this Biodiversity Action Plan, Tograí Chléire has delivered a wide range of environmental and community projects: annual Tidy Towns and Clean Coasts work; the creation of freshwater ponds on farmland; and a community anaerobic biodigester (the 'Gug') to handle food waste, a service the islands were otherwise excluded from, now regarded as an exemplar for other offshore islands, with interest expressed as far afield as Jura in Scotland. A community garden is being developed alongside the Gug, with polytunnel, rainwater collection and solar panels, forming a complete circular system in which food-waste biogas provides heat and the biofertiliser output grows local fruit and vegetables, together with an education area for all ages. The group is also in discussion with Re-turn about a deposit-return solution for the islands.

This Biodiversity Action Plan was prepared by Tograí Chléire, drawing on ecological survey and fieldwork carried out by Wildeye Ltd., and was made possible with the support of Community Foundation Ireland in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. To help deliver the plan and related work, Tograí Chléire has engaged local people on a job-by-job basis (strimming, garden work and stone-wall recording) and has initiated a Community Employment scheme to fund a 0.5 FTE role from September 2026. Tograí Chléire will lead and coordinate delivery of the plan and review it over its 2026–2031 lifetime.

Contact: Tograí Chléire, Oileán Chléire, Co. Chorcaí · eolas@oileanchleire.ie · <https://oileanchleire.ie>



The community and visiting experts at a Cape Clear biodiversity conference, awareness-raising is central to this plan.

Appendix 5, Action Summary and Indicative Costs

The table below brings all of the actions together in one place, with their priority, indicative timeframe and an indicative cost band. Costs are broad guides only, to help with planning and phasing.

Cost bands: € = low cost, largely volunteer effort (under about €500); €€ = moderate (about €500–€5,000, typically small grants); €€€ = significant (over about €5,000, usually requiring external funding).

Ref	Action	Priority	Timeframe	Cost
1.1.1	Wildlife-friendly planting at the grotto	Medium	Yr 1–2	€€
1.1.2	Verge and graveyard management for pollinators	High	Yr 1–3, ongoing	€€
1.1.3	Regular litter-picking events	Medium	Ongoing	€
1.1.4	Map/control invasive plants; Japanese Knotweed vinegar trial	High	Yr 1–5	€€
1.2.1	Wildlife-friendly planting at businesses and homes	Medium	Yr 1–3	€
1.2.2	Autumn/winter food crops for wild birds	Medium	Yr 2–4	€€
1.2.3	Create ponds and wetlands	High	Yr 2–4	€€€
1.2.4	Rewetting of drained bogs	High	Yr 2–5	€€€
1.2.5	Bracken management	High	Yr 1–5	€€€
1.2.6	Lough Errul water-quality pilot (native water lilies)	High	Yr 1–3	€€€
2.1.1	Public biodiversity events / conferences	High	Annual	€€
2.1.2	QR walking trails and leaflets	Medium	Yr 2–4	€€€
2.1.3	Ferry and harbour interpretation	Medium	Yr 2–3	€€
2.1.4	Low-water features and wildlife street art	Low	Yr 3–5	€€€
2.2.1	Local newsletter / updates	Medium	Ongoing	€
2.2.2	Wildlife-friendly gardening events	Medium	Annual	€
2.2.3	Cat awareness and neuter discussion	High	Yr 1–2	€
2.2.4	Involve landowners and farmers	High	Ongoing	€
2.2.5	Live wildlife camera feed / sea-watching hide	Low	Yr 3–5	€€€
2.3.1	Ferry and tourism operator workshop	Medium	Yr 2	€
2.4.1	Annual farming-for-nature event	High	Annual	€
3.1.1	Maintain the habitat-map baseline	High	Done / ongoing	€
3.1.2	Baseline surveys at proposed pond sites	Medium	Before works	€€
3.1.3	Map invasive plant species	High	Yr 1–2	€
3.1.4	Continued bat monitoring	Medium	Periodic	€€
3.2.1	Participate in national monitoring schemes	Medium	Ongoing	€
3.2.2	Bioblitz	Medium	Yr 5	€€
3.2.3	Re-survey invasive plant locations	Medium	Yr 5	€
4.1.1	Protect and enhance SAC heath	High	Ongoing	€€
4.1.2	Bat boxes / retain roost features	Low	Yr 2–4	€
4.1.3	Bird boxes	Low	Yr 2–4	€
4.1.4	Targeted butterfly habitat measures	Medium	Yr 2–5	€€
4.2.1	Conserve rare plant sites	Medium	Yr 2–5	€
4.2.2	Rat-eradication feasibility (DNA; Rathlin advisers)	High	Yr 1–3	€€€
4.2.3	Survey and control American Mink	Medium	Yr 2–4	€€
4.2.4	Cat Catch-Neuter-Release programme	High	Yr 1–3	€€
4.2.5	Otter, Chough and feral-pigeon measures	Low–Med	Yr 2–5	€€
4.2.6	Corncrake / hay-meadow and oats (App. 1)	Medium	Yr 2–5	€€€

Appendix 6, Glossary and Abbreviations

Term	Meaning
ACRES	Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme, Ireland's main agri-environment payment scheme for farmers
BAP / CBAP	(Community) Biodiversity Action Plan
Bioblitz	An intensive recording of all the species that can be found in an area over a short period
CNR	Catch-Neuter-Release (a humane way to manage cat populations)
Fossitt	The standard Irish habitat classification (Fossitt, 2000)
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent (a measure of staff time)
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IWDG	Irish Whale and Dolphin Group
LAWPRO	Local Authority Waters Programme
NBAP	National Biodiversity Action Plan
NBDC	National Biodiversity Data Centre
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
pNHA	Proposed Natural Heritage Area
Red List	An assessment of a species' risk of extinction
SAC	Special Area of Conservation (designated under the EU Habitats Directive)
SPA	Special Protection Area (designated under the EU Birds Directive for birds)
Flora (Protection) Order	Irish law protecting listed rare and threatened plant species