



CABB

Cooperation Across Borders for Biodiversity

2017 to 2021

Summary Project Description

for elements of CABB being undertaken in the border counties of
Donegal and Sligo

Draft 260218

Background

Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland share the influence of the Atlantic seaboard and owing to the moist, mild, oceanic climate, this region contains some unique habitats such as blanket bog, large inland and coastal waterbodies, and a myriad of lakes, fens and raised bogs. These habitats are held in high esteem internationally, not only for their great array of species, forms and features, but also for their important role in *ecosystem services* that function to provide us pure, clean water; regulate the hydrology of mountain catchments to control the risk of flooding in valleys and rivers downstream; and store carbon which is an important function to reduce climate change.

A new project, Co-operation Across Borders for Biodiversity (CABB) aims to address problems that have led to deterioration in condition, or a loss of features, of some internationally important wetland sites. CABB comprises six partner organisations and will be in operation across three regional jurisdictions, Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland. RSPB Northern Ireland is the lead partner. The other partners are BirdWatch Ireland, RSPB Scotland, Northern Ireland Water, Butterfly Conservation and Moors for the Future. CABB is funded by the European Regional Development Fund's INTERREG VA Programme (ERDF) and by the Government in Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive. Delivery of INTERREG is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

The INTERREG imperative for the specific objective: *To promote cross-border co-operation to facilitate the recovery of selected protected habitats and priority species*

A key challenge for the region is to address common environmental issues and to meet the EU Biodiversity Strategy's overall aim to "halt biodiversity loss by 2020".

Scientific evidence indicates that in addition to unsustainable development and use of natural resources, climate change is also likely to have a substantial effect on biodiversity in the region (Coll et al 2008).

The region shares three international river basins and transitional waters. Cross-border collaboration is essential to adequately address the requirements of :

- I. The Water Framework Directive. The INTERREG programme will facilitate the implementation of common approaches to the management of the water resources and the sharing of best practice and technical expertise.
- II. The Biodiversity Strategy, Birds Directive, Habitat Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The programme will facilitate the development and implementation of common approaches to the management of the environment.

The first specific objective of this INTERREG investment priority is the recovery of habitat and species of EU concern within protected areas in the eligible region. The fund is supporting increased cross-border integrated planning and management of habitats and species, using best practice methodologies. CABB, one of the project partnerships, was awarded €4.62M of funding.

Objectives of CABB

The overall objective of the CABB project is to bring about the recovery of priority habitats, active raised and blanket bog, and priority species of breeding waders as well as the Marsh Fritillary butterfly at selected sites (listed in table below) across the border region. Components to be delivered include habitat survey and mapping of Natura sites, preparing Conservation Action Plans (CAPs), conservation actions for habitats and species, development and sharing of best practice, education and outreach.

During delivery of CABB eight Conservation Action Plans (CAPs) will be produced for key Natura 2000 sites that are designated as SACs, SPAs. Furthermore, 2228ha of blanket bog habitat will be supported to attain better conservation status through delivery of habitat management works such as bog restoration in damaged habitat or sustainable grazing.

Where CAPs are being produced, the habitats will be surveyed and mapped to a level of detail to enable management recommendations to be developed and presented through the final CAP. Habitat classifications differ somewhat between the regions, but are broadly similar. Natura 2000 sites are concerned principally with conservation of habitat types or species of European (EU) importance as described and defined in the relevant technical publications. These are listed in Annexes I and II of the EU Habitats Directive. The sites where CAPs will be prepared are as follows:

Country	CAP site	Area (ha)
Northern Ireland	Garron Plateau SAC	4652
	Montiaghs Moss SAC	151
	Pettigoe Plateau SAC	1268
Ireland	Dunragh/ Pettigo Plateau SAC,	2079
	Meentygranagh SAC	530
	Croaghonagh Bog	249
	Lough Nillan Bog SPA/Lough Nillan Bog (Carricklieve) SAC	4160
Scotland	Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands SPA	18000

Summary of CAP sites in Republic of Ireland

CAP process in general

CAPs will be drawn up according to principles of stakeholder consultation and consensus-building. The main consultees are the landowners / users and farmers / farm families on the sites.

Lough Nillan Bog (Carrickatlieve) SAC [000165]

This large upland site of 4160ha is located just south of Glenties, in the west of the Bluestack Mts in Co Donegal. Qualifying habitats include [7130] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) of c.2600ha (63%), and [3110] Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (*Littorelletalia uniflorae*); the latter features c.11 small to medium sized lakes, many of which are surrounded by blanket bog. Main land-uses and impact activities are sheep grazing (NB over-stocking in the past), turf-cutting and commercial conifer afforestation (the latter excluded from the Natura sites, but affecting hydrology and trophic status of soils and water).

Lough Nillan Bog SPA [004110]

This site overlaps largely with the SAC (above) and was designated for the qualifying species listed below:

Bird Code	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
A098	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Breeding
A140	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	Breeding
A395	Greenland White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>	Wintering
A466	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina schinzii</i>	Breeding

Conservation actions proposed for the SAC will be commensurate with bird interests so as to maintain and enhance the status of their populations in so far as they depend on the management of the site.

Meentygrannagh Bog SAC [000173]

This 530ha site is located in the catchment of the River Finn, at the headwaters of both the Finn and the Swilly. It has one of the best examples of saddle bog in Co Donegal and contains a diverse complex of peatland habitats for which the site is designated, namely [7130] Blanket bogs (* if active bog), covering c.417ha (79%) of the site, [7140] Transition mires and quaking bogs, and [7230] Alkaline fens. Associated with latter habitat is the qualifying species, [1393] Slender Green Feather-moss (*Drepanocladus vernicosus*) that has been re-classified as *Hamatocaulis vernicosus*. Peripheral zones of the site also host breeding Curlew and Merlin. Hydrology, ground and surface water regimes, water quality and attendant land-uses in the site such as sheep grazing, some limited turf-cutting, drainage and adjacent commercial forestry, are issues to be addressed in the CAP.

Croaghonagh Bog SAC 000129

This relatively small SAC of 249ha, selected for [7130] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) covering c.170ha, or 68% of the site, displays some features of a raised bog and consists of a large, broad dome divided into two parts by dry, narrow channels, some of which contain swallow-holes. Greenland White-fronted Goose, Merlin, (both in Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive) Red Grouse, Curlew and Kestrel have been recorded. Red Deer, Otter and Hare also occur on the site.

Lough Mourne adjoins the site to the north. This lake is managed for public water supply abstraction, which may amplify stress on the bog due to lowering ambient water levels and the effects of drying. An area in the north of the site had been subject to ground preparation for plantation forestry which did not proceed. Restoration by drain blocking was carried out in 2005 by Coillte as part of the EU LIFE-Nature Programme. The south and south-eastern margins of the bog have been affected by turbary, and there are indications that its surface is drying out in places. These are some of the matters that the CAP will attempt to address.

Dunragh Loughs/Pettigo Plateau SAC [001125]

This large SAC is an undulating, mid-altitude plateau comprising the qualifying habitats [7130] Blanket bogs (* if active bog), covering c.540ha (27%), and [4010] Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*, covering c.401ha (20%), of the site. The site also encompasses the Pettigo Plateau Nature Reserve SPA [004099] designated for:

A395 Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris*

The SAC and SPA area is also noteworthy for other bird species including Hen Harrier, Merlin, Golden Plover, Red-throated Diver (all listed in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive) and Red Grouse.

The SAC is remote and relatively undisturbed due to poor access. However, the surrounding area to the south and east has been subject to very extensive afforestation, there are issues of turf cutting and past overstocking of sheep along the western site margins and the exotic shrub *Rhododendron ponticum* has begun to invade the southwest of the SAC and is gaining a foothold there. These issues will be addressed in the CAP.

Active management projects with capital works for [7130] Blanket Bog restoration

There is funding for two projects involving capital works within two SACs, as agreed with NPWS, in line with meeting conservation objectives to restore the favourable conservation condition of blanket bogs. Through CABB, BirdWatch Ireland will plan, manage and carry out these projects.

Fiddandarry Bog restoration project / Ox Mountains SAC (002006), Co Sligo

NPWS owns 450ha of blanket bog at Fiddandarry within the Ox Mountains SAC, west of Lough Easky. Formerly under Coillte control, an extensive network of drains had been dug in preparation for new plantation forestry, but this did not subsequently proceed.

CABB / Birdwatch Ireland will undertake a drain blocking scheme, scheduled for 2019. A monitoring program will be established between 2018-2020 to attain baseline habitat and hydrological data and enable habitat improvements to be assessed during and beyond the project time-frame.

Pettigo Plateau Nature Reserve SPA [004099]

This state-owned 692ha area of blanket bog, wet heath and oligotrophic lakes is a Statutory Nature Reserve and is designated Pettigo Plateau Nature Reserve SPA [004099] for wintering Greenland White-fronted Geese. The site also lies within the larger Dunragh Loughs/Pettigo Plateau SAC [001125]. CABB / Birdwatch Ireland will undertake the re-fencing the perimeter of the nature reserve area in order to prevent uncontrolled entry of livestock and to implement a sustainable grazing regime. Baseline vegetation and habitat characteristics are to be established through a monitoring scheme that will be set up during the project. This will provide the basis to assess and manage grazing in the future.

References

NPWS (2016) Conservation Objectives: Lough Nillan Bog (Carrickatlieve) SAC 000165. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

NPWS (2016) Conservation objectives for Lough Nillan Bog SPA [004110]. Generic Version
5.0. Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.