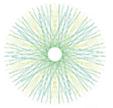




An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



"The European Agricultural Fund  
for Rural Development: Europe  
investing in rural areas"



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AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

# HEN HARRIER PROJECT

# ANNUAL REPORT

YEAR 3: MAY 2019 - APRIL 2020



**ADDRESS:** Hen Harrier Project  
Unit 2 Oran Point  
Main Street  
Oranmore  
Galway

**CONTACT:** (091) 792 865

# Glossary



BPS	Basic Payment Scheme
DAERA NI-	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Northern Ireland
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
GLAMS	Generic, Land Management System
GMIT	Galway Mayo Institute of Technology
HHP	Hen Harrier Project
ITAG	Information Technology Association Galway
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service

## ANNUAL REPORTS YEAR 1 & 2



The Hen Harrier Project Annual Reports for Year 1 and Year 2 are available online via our website and provide a summary of the Project's activities in our first two years of development and operation.

Available at the following links:  
<http://www.henharrierproject.ie/HHPAR2017.pdf>  
<http://www.henharrierproject.ie/HHPAR2018.pdf>

# Introduction

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## May 2019 - April 2020

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The third year of the Hen Harrier Programme has seen an increase in the number of participants from 629 in Year 1 to almost 1,600 by the summer of 2020. These farmers manage 37,000 ha of land representing over 65% of the total agricultural area of the Special Protection Area (SPA) network. The summer of 2019 was also the first season where the new Hen Harrier Programme App was operational. This facilitated the collection of data on almost 19,000 fields.

Habitat payments worth over €3,000,000 were paid to participants this year. This year also seen the commencement of the first payments for supporting actions. The issuing of the Hen Harrier payment was delayed, but €453,110.90 was paid out to 972 participants in 2020.

Building on the lessons learned in 2018 the Hen Harrier Program developed an App for advisors to input data from field assessments into our database. This was an extremely successful innovation, without it the collection and collation of habitat data from almost 19,000 fields would have been impossible.

The 2019 breeding season was a very productive one for Hen Harriers with a 35% increase in the number of chicks fledged compared to the baseline survey in 2017. While this increase was not evenly distributed across the 6 SPAs it did represent the first time since the SPAs were designated that breeding success reached the levels needed to sustain the population.

Like almost all other organisations the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic had a very serious impact on Hen Harrier Project operations. In particular the provision of training farmers and advisors, Hen Harrier monitoring and the printing and distribution of Annual Works Plans have been affected. In response to this the Project team have developed alternative mechanisms for the provision of training to farmers and advisor. The first in a series of instructional videos was produced on the delivery of wild bird cover strips. A link to this 3-minute video was sent to farmers availing of this action so that they can watch it on their phone.



# Programme Expansion



## May 2019 - April 2020

The second round of contract offers were made in April 2019. Of the 1,059 contracts offered 895 were accepted. This increased the number of participants to 1,525. There was one withdrawal from the Programme. Following an assessment of the 2019 habitat payments it was determined that the project could accommodate additional farmers. A total of 81 farmers managing 932.75 ha of designated land were offered a contract in early 2020. 68 of these farmers farming 1,233.29 ha accepted a contract, increasing the area farmed by participants in the Project to 67.29% of the total agricultural area of the six Special Protection Areas. Year 3 of the Hen Harrier Programme saw the number of participants more than double, the roll out of the Hen Harrier Programme App and the further development of our IT capabilities has made the processing of data from over 19,000 fields possible.

## Steering Group

The Steering Group met on three occasions. There was a rotation of the private advisor and farmer representatives. Denis Touhy and Denis Hayes completed their terms and were succeeded by Martin Mulvihill and Dan O' Donoghue. The Project team would like to thank the outgoing members for their input and assistance to the Project throughout the year.

Table 1: Steering Group Meetings

Meeting	Venue	Date
1	Oranmore, Co. Galway	10/09/2019
2	Roundwood, Co. Laois	11/11/2019
3	Templeglantine, Co. Limerick	26/02/2020

### STATS

629

CONTRACTS ACCEPTED IN 2018

1,126

CONTRACTS OFFERED IN 2019

896

CONTRACTS ACCEPTED IN 2019

37,610

HECTARES OF LAND UNDER CONTRACT

>19,000

FIELD HABITAT ASSESSMENTS SUBMITTED

66.7%

SPA AGRICULTURAL AREA

# Advisor Training



## Hen Harrier Programme App Training

Pre-season advisor refresher courses were held in Lyreacrumpane, Co. Kerry on May 31st and in Loughrea, Co. Galway on June 5th 2019. A phase 2 training course for new advisors was also held in Lyreacrumpane on May 28th and 29th 2019. All courses included training on the operation of the Hen Harrier Programme App and assistance with getting advisors set up on the new system.

## Advisor Seminars

End of season debriefing seminars for advisors were held in Castleisland, Co. Kerry and Tullamore Co. Offaly on October 1st 2019 and October 4th 2019, respectively. On both occasions training included field demonstrations of wild bird cover strips.



Hen Harrier Programme Advisors testing the new App in the Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA, June 2019.

# Staff

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## Padraig Cronin

The Hen Harrier Project welcomed Padraig Cronin to the team as Project Farm Advisor in June 2019. Padraig is an agricultural and environmental specialist who graduated from the University of Wales Aberystwyth. He has worked on many conservation projects throughout the last 20 years with a specialisation in the development and demonstration of sustainable land use management techniques and practices. He worked as farm advisor on the KerryLIFE Project 2014-2019 which developed a range of result-based and incentivised measures to better manage the lowland and upland portions of hill farms in the Blackwater and Caragh river catchments, necessary to support the conservation of the critically endangered Freshwater Pearl Mussel. The design and lessons learnt for this pilot project were the precursor for the Pearl Mussel Project (PMP) locally led European Innovation Partnership (EIP) which includes results-based payments. Padraig is Project Farm Advisor for the Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA and Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountain SPA.

## Staff Training

The Project team ran a training exercise in Derrygoolin, Co. Clare in the Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA on the 27th July 2019 prior to annual farm verifications. This was to ensure consistent standards of habitat assessment within the team.



# Local Actions



This provides support for actions that could not be delivered through an individual farm plan. € 80,000 was budgeted for this round. This initiative is available to farmers either individually or in groups, community groups, small local businesses, schools and sports or social clubs serving the community in breeding Hen Harrier SPAs.

Applications must be under one or more of the following themes:

- Enhancing Biodiversity
- Agricultural Sustainability
- Education and Training
- Support for local food or craft producers
- Community Development

Four projects including the development of a riverside walk by Athea Tidy Town Committee (images below) were partially funded by the Hen Harrier Project. Other projects were completed by community groups and schools in Kerry and Limerick. The remaining projects are still underway. A further round of Local Action Grants was advertised in February 2020.





# Payments

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## Hen Harrier Payments

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A total of 972 participants across all 6 SPAs qualified for a Hen Harrier payment of up to €1,200 in recognition of the importance of their lands supporting breeding and roosting Hen Harriers. The total paid out in respect of the 2019 breeding season was €453,110.90.

All SPAs except the Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA qualified for the SPA level bonus. A total of 917 farmers in all SPAs (except the Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA) qualified for the SPA level bonus payments. The total number of farmers that qualified for a bonus payment because of proximity to a nest was 201, of these 58 were in the Slieve Aughties.

The number of farmers who qualified for the maximum bonus of €1,200 was 60. In all cases these farms had a successful nest either on or very close to the farm.

These payments were due to farmers in April 2020 but were delayed until May 2020 as a consequence of the Covid 19 lockdown.

## Participant Funds not yet Issued

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Payments were not made to two participants (both are deceased). The funds involved will be held until instructions are received from their estate.

## Reviews and Appeals

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There were six requests for a review, two of these were dealt with by the Project Manager. One was upheld and a supplementary payment was issued to the participant, one was refused. A single case was appealed to the Appeals Commissioner who held an oral hearing on this matter in Nenagh. The Appeals Commissioner subsequently turned down the appeal. There are four cases outstanding where no decision on the request for a review has been made. It is hoped to progress these as soon as possible.

# Annual Works Plans

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The approval of Annual Works Plans has proved to be a challenging process. Assessing and screening these manually is very labour intensive and is not a viable proposition for a large-scale programme. To overcome this the Project has developed the PASS (Partially Automated Screening System). This gives the Project Officer enhanced access to all relevant data sources enabling a faster decision-making process with a reduced risk of error. Using this new system the processing of multiples of the current workload in an acceptable period is now feasible.

In addition the suitability and location of each action has to be assessed in the context of the habitat type and quality, and the potential for disturbance of Hen Harrier nests or roosts during either the undertaking and/or the operational phase of the supporting actions. The assessment also has to consider seasonal work periods for certain actions if required.

As technical difficulties limited the Projects capacity to approve proposed actions in 2019 it was decided to roll over the applications for 2019 and merge them with those for 2020. This resulted in a total of 1,041 Annual Works Plans being submitted to the Programme. It should be noted that this figure includes two Annual Works Plans, i.e. 2019 & 2020 for some participants. The total number of proposed actions was 3,528.

An analysis of application patterns shows that only 50% of advisors have submitted an Annual Works Plan. This suggests that a number of advisors may not be facilitating access to this aspect of the Hen Harrier Programme for participating farmers. This is a serious concern for the future.

The issuing of hard copies of approved Annual Works Plans has been delayed by restrictions on work practices and the unavailability of external service providers due to the Covid 19 emergency. It is hoped that these can be overcome and that hardcopies of approved plans can be posted to participants later in 2020.

The Project team were very pleased with the increased interest in the Wild Bird Cover (WBC) action following on from the emphasis on this action at advisor and farmer training events. Over 24 km of WBC strips are planned for the summer of 2020.



The Supporting Actions guide was reviewed and updated in 2020 ready for the post habitat assessment period and is available on our website.



# Farmer Training

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## Open Days

Farmer open days were held in each of the six SPAs. These open days covered the operation of the scoring system in different habitats, a briefing on the use of Hen Harrier Programme feed blocks and guidance on grazing management was provided. Approx. 300 farmers attended these open days.

Table 3: Farmer Open Days & Locations

Location	Special Protection Area	Date
Cordal, Co. Kerry	Stacks, Mullagherierks, West Limerick Hills & Mount Eagle SPA	May 29th
Lyracrompane, Co. Kerry	Stacks, Mullagherierks, West Limerick Hills & Mount Eagle SPA	May 27th
Derrybrien, Co. Galway	Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA	May 25th
Turkenagh, Co. Clare	Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA	June 6th
Ballyhahill, Co. Limerick	Stacks, Mullagherierks, West Limerick Hills & Mount Eagle SPA	June 4th
Scotstown, Monaghan	Slieve Beagh SPA	June 19th
Aghagurty, Co. Offaly	Slieve Blooms SPA	June 12th
Caherdowney, Co. Cork	Mullaghanish to Musheramore SPA	June 11th
Lacknagoneeny, Co. Limerick	Slievefelims to Silvermines SPA	June 10th

## Wild Bird Cover Demonstrations

Wild bird cover open days were held to demonstrate to farmers that a crop planted for wildlife was a viable option on upland sites.

Location	Special Protection Area	Date
Cordal, Co. Kerry	Stacks, Mullagherierks, West Limerick Hills & Mount Eagle SPA	August 30th
Rosenallis, Co. Laois	Slieve Blooms SPA	September 5th



# Farmer Training

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## Specialist Training

These courses were targeted at farms where Japanese Knotweed was reported by their advisor as being present during the summer habitat assessment. The venues were chosen to facilitate farmers in known clusters of Japanese Knotweed infestation. They were timed just before the optimum season for treating the species. A total of 43 farmers attended these specialist courses. These farmers were paid € 100 each to cover their costs. Surplus stocks of Personal Protective Equipment acquired for specialist training courses including over 100 sets of full body suits and eye protection were distributed to GP practices in rural County Galway at the start of the Covid 19 outbreak.

Location	Special Protection Area	Date
Carrigerry, Co. Limerick	Stacks, Mullagherierks, West Limerick Hills & Mount Eagle SPA	September 7th
Mountshannon, Co. Clare	Slieve Aughty SPA	September 14th



## Training Videos

A training video instructing on site preparation, sowing and aftercare of wild bird cover strips was produced by the project. This video was specifically targeted at farmers who were undertaking this action. A link to the video was sent by text to all farmers who had been approved for the wild bird cover action so that they could watch it on a smart phone. It was also published on Facebook and Twitter and will be available for use in future training events.







# Monitoring 2019

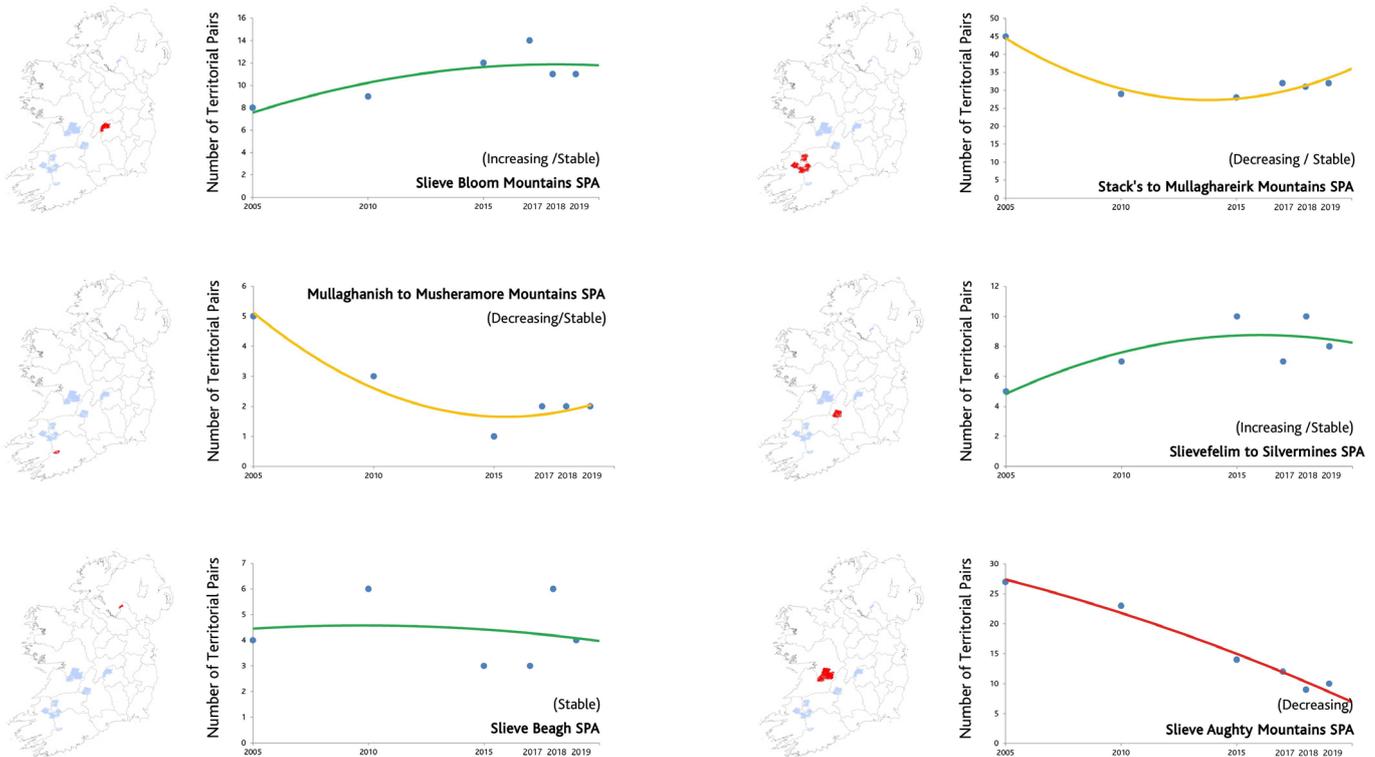


Figure 1. Breeding population trends per SPA.

The Slieve Aughty Mountains straddles the Galway and Clare border and is the 2nd largest SPA in the network. This SPA supported 27 territorial pairs of breeding Hen Harrier in 2005, however since then the population has undergone catastrophic decline. There were just six confirmed territories recorded during surveys in 2019 and one possible territorial pair, which marks a 75% drop in numbers over the last 15 years. Four of the six confirmed pairs were successful in fledging a total of seven young. In spite of the continued decline in the number of breeding pairs the number of young birds fledged shows an increase over previous years.

The last of the six SPAs lies on the border with Northern Ireland in Co. Monaghan. Slieve Beagh is a similar size to Mullaghanish but is part of a larger cross-border population within the Slieve Beagh - Mullaghfad - Lisnaskea SPA designation in Northern Ireland and there has been some interchange of breeding pairs between years. There were three confirmed pairs and one possible pair recorded during surveys in 2019. Two pairs within the SPA successfully fledged four young.

Overall, a comparison of the estimated Hen Harrier numbers in 2005 shows that the total SPA population in 2019 is now 33% smaller than that recorded at the time of designation.

# Monitoring 2019

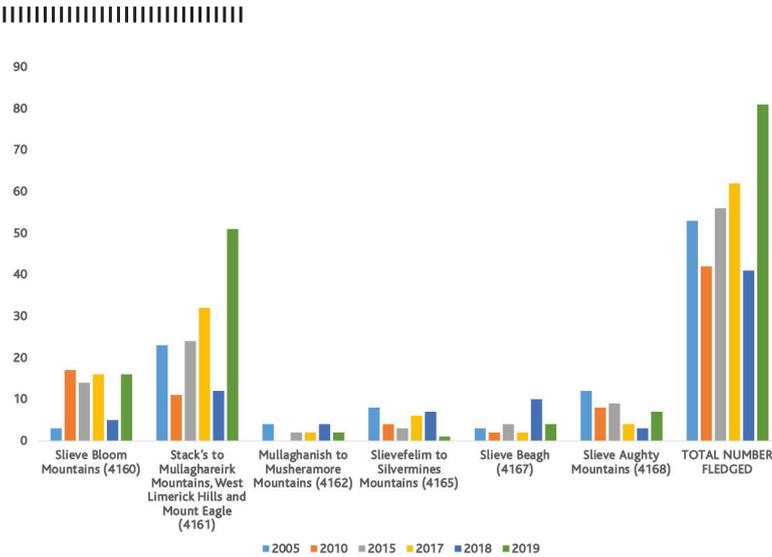


Figure 2. Hen Harrier Productivity within the SPA Network.

There was a marked variability in productivity between sites in the SPA network ranging from 0.14 young birds fledged per breeding pair in the Slievefelims to Silvermines Mountains SPA to 1.82 per breeding pair in the Stacks, Mullagherierks, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA. In spite of this, 2019 was a productive year with a total of 81 young birds fledged. This is the highest number of fledged young known within the network in the last 14 years. The gains were most pronounced in the Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA.

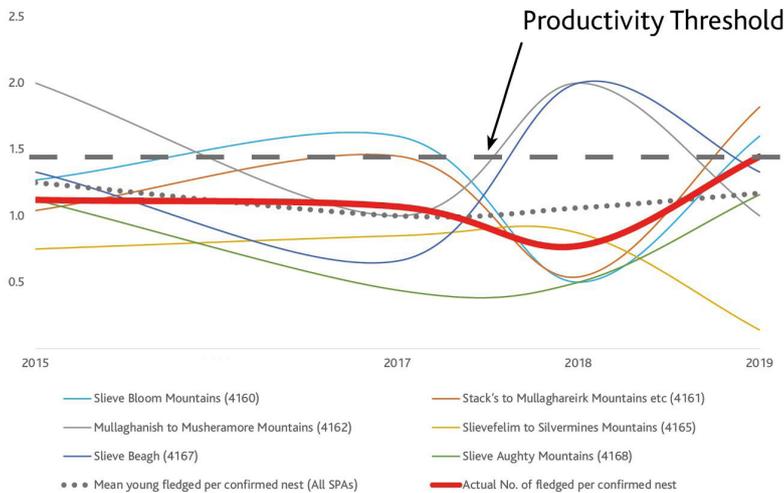


Figure 3. Fledged young per confirmed nest.

While overall breeding success in 2019 was the best since monitoring of the SPAs began it was still below the productivity threshold in 4 out of the 6 SPAs. SPA monitoring data (2015 - 2019) shows that mean fledging rate across the SPA network ranges from 0.99 - 1.25 chicks fledged per breeding pair. This is below what is required for the population to be self-sustaining. Breeding success varies considerably between the different SPAs and from year to year. There are a large number of factors that can influence nest success. These include habitat quality, predation, inclement weather, disturbance, and nest abandonment.

The good breeding performance in two Special Protection Areas shows that the Hen Harrier can recover if given the chance. With continued farmer co-operation in delivering improved habitat quality and prey resources, further increases are certainly possible.

# Nest Protection

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Nest Protection Officers were employed in all SPAs except the Slievefelims to Silvermines Mountains SPA where there continues to be a difficulty in recruiting suitable personnel. To facilitate improved management of the resources that are committed to nest protection the Project have developed a nest protection management system. This App-based technology improves the collation of nest protection records and provides the data required to plan the future delivery of this service.

# Fire Resilience

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The Project continued its engagement with Laois and Offaly Fire Service, NPWS and Coillte over the development of a landscape level fire resilience strategy for the Slieve Bloom Mountains. Unfortunately, the Covid 19 lockdown made it impossible to progress the development of a landscape fire resilience plan.

This delay is regrettable as the fire risk in the Slieve Blooms remains very high and coordinated action to reduce this is required. The Hen Harrier Project have introduced a wildfire risk assessment into the annual habitat assessment carried out by advisors. This will be used to identify areas where specialist training and other interventions may be required to reduce fire risk.

The Hen Harrier Project intend to introduce a multi-purpose ponds supporting action in 2020. This will strategically locate small reservoirs to provide water for fire-fighting operations. These ponds will also function as a wildlife habitat and can provide a source of drinking water for livestock.



# Innovation

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## Grazing Trials

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Further trials with the Hen Harrier Programme feed blocks were carried out in 2019. Following feedback from farmers who used the product in 2018 the size of each bucket was reduced from 25Kg to 18Kg and an improved handle was incorporated. Animal performance was once again very encouraging, 56 animals or 93.33 % gained weight over the course of the trial.

A more detailed assessment was made of one herd which provided 21 animals for the trial. The animals in this herd were weighed on May 6th and again on July 25th, during this period they were grazed exclusively on an upland site dominated by Purple Moor Grass or Molinia. The animals (15 Hereford crosses, 4 Friesians, a Friesian Cross and a Jersey cross) had average daily weight gains of ranging from -0.2 kg/day to 1.28 Kg/ day. The 3 animals which lost weight were all Male, two were Friesians and one was a Jersey cross. All the Heifers and all the Hereford crosses put on weight.

The best performing animal was a Hereford cross bullock which was 25 months old at the start of the trial, this animal went from 434Kgs to 536.5 Kgs in 80 days on a diet of Purple Moor Grass supplemented by the Hen Harrier Project feed blocks. An average daily weight gain of 1.28Kgs/ day.

The grazing trials were badly affected by the delays in getting animals slaughtered as planned due to the dispute between farmers and the meat companies in the summer of 2019. This resulted in the forced retention of many animals on farms with extra feeding and management costs.

The farmers who took part in the trial were compensated for this loss by the Hen Harrier Project. As in 2018 Dawn Meats paid a bonus on animals from the trial that were presented for slaughter. Beef from some of these animals was served at the awards dinner for the Listowel Food Fair. An additional event was held for farmers in the Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains SPA (below) to allow them an opportunity to taste mountain beef. The beef was very well received at both events.





# Innovation



## Wild Bird Cover

The Hen Harrier Project have developed our own seed mix for wild bird cover strips. This was distributed to farmers who are delivering this action to test its effectiveness and suitability. It is a Triticale/ Linseed mix with smaller quantities of Phacelia, Vetch, Mustard, Buckwheat and Radish. A training video showing how this crop can be established with minimal equipment has been produced. This video was distributed to farmers availing of this action by text allowing them to watch it on their smart phones.



## Tackling Nutritional Deficits in Upland Cattle Grazing

Feed buckets were provided to any farmer who wanted them at the open days hosted by the Project. There were a number of modifications compared to the blocks used in 2018. For ergonomic reasons, the weight of each bucket was reduced from 25Kg to 18Kg, the carrying handle was improved and the label was redesigned. There was no change to the composition of the feed block. A total of 8 tonnes of feed blocks were distributed to farmers for them to field test.



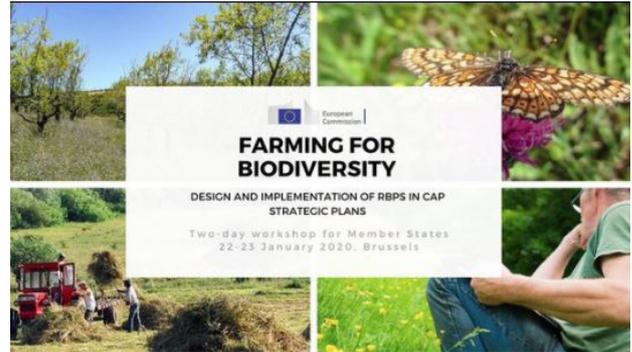


# Engagement in Europe



## Results-based Payment Schemes in the next CAP

The Hen Harrier Project were invited to Brussels over two days in January to present at a European Commission workshop "Farming for Biodiversity : Design and Implementation of RBPS in CAP Strategic Plans". This was attended by staff from the agriculture and conservation Ministries from over 20 EU Member States at the European Court of Auditors. Project Manager Fergal Monaghan addressed the Ministers on the approach developed by the Programme.



## Rural Development in CAP post 2020

The Hen Harrier Project were invited to present at an event organised by the Rural Coalition and the Coalition of European Agriregions "Amplifying the local voices: Addressing Rural Development in CAP post 2020" on 18th February 2020 in Brussels.

Project Manager Fergal Monaghan spoke at the event on the Projects objectives, experiences and aspirations for the next round of the Rural Development Programme and the expansion of Results-based schemes.



# Collaboration



## Results-based Pilot Scotland

Following visits from Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Agricultural College to the Project in August 2019, the Project were invited to assist the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) with a Scottish Natural Heritage Project in Argyll and the Isle of Skye. During a three day visit to Scotland in November 2019 Ryan Wilson-Parr briefed farmers in the Isle of Skye and Argyll on results-based concept and the use of scorecards for assessing habitat quality which could be adapted for hill and crofting enterprises.



## 'Lessons Learned through Shared Experiences'

The Hen Harrier Project welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the Environmental Innovation Partnership workshop funded by the Heritage Council. During the Burren Winterage 2019 the Project joined other EIP representatives to share experiences in two main focus areas: the EIP-AGRI process in Ireland and possible mainstreaming post-2020.

The forum discussed some of the key issues arising from three broad questions – what happens to the current EIPs and their innovations after the projects end; what framework should the next RDP provide not only for the roll-over/roll-out of the EIP innovations themselves but in terms of wider development and integration of coherent approaches to the type of issues they address; what is needed in terms of State action to encourage and nurture local cooperation and innovation? The findings were published by the EFNCP and GMIT.

European Innovation Partnerships - Agriculture (EIP-AGRI) in Ireland 2014-20 – lessons and recommendations for policy post-2020

Gwyn Jones, James Moran & Mark Robins



# Research

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## Ph.D Programmes

The Hen Harrier Project continues its sponsorship of a full time PhD student in Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT). Naomi McMorrow is working on methods for assessing the value of public goods from High Nature Value farmlands and on the potential for synergies and conflicts in the delivery of different ecosystem services. This programme commenced November 2018. This work is under the supervision of Dr. James Moran (GMIT), Dr. Caroline Sullivan Hen Harrier Project (HHP) and Dr. Marc Ruddock (Golden Eagle Trust Ltd)

The Project is also supporting Ryan Wilson-Parr in a part time PhD at GMIT working on the non-breeding (wintering) ecology of the Hen Harrier in Ireland and analysing data collected through the Programme, exploring the potential for results-based farming models to be applied as part of integrated agri-environment measures to support the conservation of the Hen Harrier population throughout its annual cycle. This work is under the supervision of Dr. James Moran (GMIT), Dr. Barry O'Donoghue (Irish Hen Harrier Winter Survey) and Dr. Marc Ruddock (Golden Eagle Trust Ltd).

The Hen Harrier Project are also collaborating with a veterinary medicine student in the University of Veterinary Medicine Budapest researching cattle performance on upland pastures analysing grazing trial data collected through the Programme.

## Special Note

The Hen Harrier Project would like to make a special mention about Aoife Hanranhan's achievement in qualifying the Freestyle World Kayak Championships in July 2019. Aoife worked for a year as an Office Manager for the Hen Harrier Project where she made a very significant contribution before beginning a Biomedical Engineering degree. Aoife won her heat and narrowly missed out on qualifying for the final in Sort, Spain. The Hen Harrier Project were delighted to support Aoife's participation in the World Championships and wish her the very best in her studies and in her sport.



# Contacts

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Email: [info@henharrierproject.ie](mailto:info@henharrierproject.ie)  
Online: [www.henharrierproject.ie/contact.html](http://www.henharrierproject.ie/contact.html)

 [facebook.com/henharrierproject/](https://facebook.com/henharrierproject/)

 [twitter.com/HenHarrierProj](https://twitter.com/HenHarrierProj)

OFFICE (0) 91 792 865

**FERGAL MONAGHAN**

Project Manager

Mobile: 087 605 8670

Email: [fergal.monaghan@henharrierproject.ie](mailto:fergal.monaghan@henharrierproject.ie)

**Dr. CAROLINE SULLIVAN:**

Assistant Manager and Project Officer for Slieve Aughty Mountains.

Mobile: 087 649 9948

Email: [caroline.sullivan@henharrierproject.ie](mailto:caroline.sullivan@henharrierproject.ie)

**RYAN WILSON-PARR:**

Project Officer for Slieve Beagh; Slieve Blooms; and, Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains.

Mobile: 087 151 0849

Email: [ryan.wilson-parr@henharrierproject.ie](mailto:ryan.wilson-parr@henharrierproject.ie)

**PADRAIG CRONIN:**

Project Officer for Stacks to Mullaghareirk Mountains and, Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains.

Mobile: 087 362 3913

Email: [padraig.cronin@henharrierproject.ie](mailto:padraig.cronin@henharrierproject.ie)

**EOIN McCARTHY:**

Project Officer for Stacks to Mullaghareirk Mountains and, Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains.

Mobile: 087 703 4348

Email: [eoin.mccarthy@henharrierproject.ie](mailto:eoin.mccarthy@henharrierproject.ie)



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INNOVATION & RURALITY

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YEAR 3: MAY 2019 - APRIL 2020

Email: [info@henharrierproject.ie](mailto:info@henharrierproject.ie)  
Online: [www.henharrierproject.ie](http://www.henharrierproject.ie)

 [facebook.com/henharrierproject/](https://facebook.com/henharrierproject/)

 [twitter.com/HenHarrierProj](https://twitter.com/HenHarrierProj)



ADDRESS: Hen Harrier Project  
Unit 2 Oran Point  
Main Street  
Oranmore  
Galway

CONTACT: (091) 792 865