

# Going native

Planning authorities are taking an increasingly closer look at some of the furry residents living on site before construction can begin

When Fingal County Council finally granted planning permission for Dublin Airport's €395 million Terminal 2 at the end of 2006, few people at the DAA questioned the requirement for a bat specialist and the removal of trees only between certain months of the year. Apart from the fact there was a comprehensive traffic management strategy to arrange, legislation on the protection of natural habitats and species has become an increasingly common requirement for development agencies and contractors in the Irish industry.

Now in its second year, the Department of the Environment's Notice Nature campaign aims to raise awareness of the risks of habitat destruction and the effects of the construction industry on Ireland's natural biodiversity.

"Hedgerows are like Ireland's version of rainforests," says Notice Nature spokesperson Emma El-Sahn, "they provide a home to a great number of species and are their corridors for migration." To assist in the protection of Ireland's biodiversity, the National Road Authority has published guidance documents to minimize the impact of road schemes on badgers, bats and watercourse crossings prior to and during construction and Intel Ireland is involved in the protection and conservation of the River Rhy, which runs through the giant Intel site in Leixlip, County Kildare. Intel staff chair quarterly meetings of Friends of the River Rhy involving local community, fishing and local authority representatives to protect the river. Their activities include controlling weeds, planting trees and communication to Kildare County Council of any discharge problems upstream. Intel has also funded the improvement and development of the river bed for salmon and trout to rest and spawn which was carried out by the OPW.

Soil, waste concrete and toxins in runoff from construction sites are probably the most obvious impacts of a construction site on its immediate environment, but habitats can also be broken up and destroyed simply by noise or even the timing of a project, which can impact on nesting birds

depending on the time of year. Habitat fragmentation

doesn't mean animals or native species

can't move around, but rather it subjects them to greater mortality as they try to cross the disturbed habitat. Mobile animals (especially birds and mammals) retreat into remnant patches of habitat. If the connectivity and extent of

native habitats,

which were once continuous, are divided into separate fragments during construction, many may not be able to survive as a result.

According to the Department, projects should be designed and implemented so as to avoid or compensate

adequately for any adverse impacts

on natural habitats and biodiversity. Site clearing must be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Wildlife Act 1976 (as amended in 2000). For example, removal of hedgerows and trees must not take place from the 1st March to the 31st August.

Corridors connecting fragmented habitats should be

provided – these include creating corridors, stepping stones and buffer zones to aid the movement of different organisms. A corridor could be a hedgerow or a riparian strip (green edge along a river). As well as reducing the risk of flooding, the use of Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) in the remediation

of runoff also assists in protecting and enhancing groundwater quality. Settlement ponds, used for the settlement of suspended solids during the construction stage, can provide habitats for amphibians such as frogs.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process for anticipating the effects on the environment caused by a development (EPA 2002).

Certain

construction/development projects will always have significant

environmental effects. On the basis of this, EIA is mandatory for all projects listed in Annex I of

European Communities Directive 85/337/EEC (as amended by Directive 97/11/EC). Thresholds are

specified in respect of most project types in Annex I. Where

projects are sub-threshold it must be determined on a case-by-case basis whether it will have a significant effect on the environment, for example in terms of site sensitivity, and therefore should be subject to EIA. As part of the EIA process details of the existing environment must be provided, positive and negative potential significant impacts assessed and mitigation measures proposed to reduce, avoid or remedy any potential negative impacts identified. ■

For more information on how to help protect the biodiversity of Ireland please visit [www.noticenature.ie](http://www.noticenature.ie)

