

Guidelines for the protection of **biodiversity**

TOURISM

Who to contact

If you would like more information about biodiversity or wildlife issues the following may be able to help:

Notice Nature

www.noticenature.ie

National Parks & Wildlife Service

Tel: 01.888.2000 *www.npws.ie*

Failte Ireland

Tel: 01.884.722 *www.failteireland.ie*

Your local authority Biodiversity / Heritage Officer

Environmental NGOs

See *www.noticenature.ie* for links to relevant NGO's and local authority contacts

Introduction

In Ireland, increased economic development has seen increased pressure on the natural environment with many of our native species and habitats becoming endangered. Ireland has a National Biodiversity Plan in place, which sets out a programme of work aimed at securing the conservation and sustainable use of our biodiversity. The key element of the Plan is that every sector of society must play a role in our efforts to protect our natural environment, which provides us with critical environmental goods and services.

The purpose of the 'Notice Nature' guidelines is to assist the tourism sector to identify ways in which it can contribute to the protection and sustainable use of Ireland's biodiversity. The guidelines cover the sustainable development and management of tourism policies, strategies, projects and activities. They provide technical guidance to a range of national and local stakeholders including;

- Policy and decision makers;
- Managers with responsibility for tourism and/or biodiversity;
- Representative tourism bodies;
- NGOs; and
- All those involved in any one of Irelands 18,000 tourism and hospitality businesses.

The main aims of these guidelines are:

- (a) To raise awareness within the tourism sector of the importance of biodiversity; and**
- (b) To identify and promote good practice for the conservation of biodiversity throughout the sector.**

Tourism is a diverse and wide-ranging industry and in order to be as widely applicable as possible these guidelines set out a number of general principles which should be adhered to across the sector. They also provide specific guidance, which has been tailored to particular aspects of the sector. Although the primary focus of the guidelines is the protection of the most vulnerable and most important ecosystems and habitats, they are also intended to advise on the conservation of biodiversity in all areas.

What is biodiversity and why protect it?

Biodiversity is the term used to describe the variety of all life on earth from the smallest and simplest micro-organism to the complex system that is a rainforest. It includes the habitats and ecosystems, which support this life and how life-forms interact with each other and the rest of the environment. Global biodiversity is under increasing threat from factors such as development, climate change, introduced invasive alien species and illegal trade. In 2004, it was estimated that worldwide, 15,589 species were threatened with extinction, including 12% of birds, 23% of mammals and 25% of coniferous trees. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an international treaty with 189 countries and the EU as Parties; it is focused on securing the conservation and sustainable use of global biodiversity. Ireland ratified the CBD in 1996 and as a Party we are obliged to develop and implement national strategies to meet the aims of the Convention.

Biodiversity is important because it provides a source of significant economic, environmental, health and cultural benefits. It provides us with a wide range amount of goods and services including food, raw materials, clothing and medicine that help us to sustain life on earth. To date plant-based medicines, such as aspirin and quinine have provided more than 3 billion people with their primary health care. Biodiversity also brings indirect economic benefits without the need to consume resources. Trees, for example perform vital ecosystem services by regulating water supply, purifying the atmosphere and recycling nutrients to provide fertile soil. This is in addition to providing habitats and food for wildlife and a source of timber for construction.

Biodiversity In Ireland

Ireland is a land of varied habitats including forests, grasslands, farmlands, bogs, ferns, dunes and marsh, all of which contain a rich assemblage of wildlife. Our country is home to over 400 species of birds, 28 species of land mammal, more than 4,000 plant species and over 12,000 species of insect.

Over recent years however, our biodiversity has become increasingly threatened. Up to 150 species of plants and birds in Ireland are currently under threat of extinction and many important habitats are being lost or degraded. The main risks to biodiversity arise from:

- Over-exploitation of resources
- Inappropriate agriculture and afforestation practices
- Increased infrastructure development
- Fragmentation, destruction and degradation of habitats
- Pollution
- Invasion of non-native species (e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Rhododendron, and Zebra Mussel)

Endangered wildlife

Threatened plants

Many native species of flowering plants have declined in numbers and have even disappeared in some parts of the country. The Irish Vascular Plant Red Data Book classifies the Arctic Sandwort and the Sea Stock, as 'critically endangered', facing imminent risk of extinction. A further 52 are categorised as 'endangered', signifying that they are declining or grow in habitats that are likely to be degraded and 69 are 'vulnerable' meaning that they would become endangered if their habitats were disturbed in the future.

Threatened birds

Currently, 18 species of birds found in Ireland are globally threatened. These include the Corncrake, the Nightjar, the Lapwing, the Quail, the Hen Harrier and the Barn Owl. It has been estimated that the Irish Barn Owl breeding population has declined by 75% over the past ten years. The destruction and replacement of old ruins and barns have been a major contributor to Barn Owl decline. Corncrakes, also threatened with global extinction, are extremely rare, present only in small numbers in North Donegal, parts of West Connaught and in the Shannon Callows. Their decline is largely due to intensive farming practices, which can destroy the Corncrakes nests and drive them from their habitats.

Habitat diversity in Ireland

Inland waters and wetlands

Ecosystems with standing and flowing waters, and wetlands including boglands are abundant in wildlife and important sites for biodiversity. These habitats are threatened from pollution, alien species, eutrophication, introduction of fish stocks, over-grazing, and peat and gravel extraction. Ireland is the most important site in Europe for 'raised' bogs and possesses 8% of the world's blanket bog. Despite the fact that over 80% of their former extent has been lost, Ireland remains one of the few countries where a wide range of peatlands exist in a near natural state. These habitats are unique and are homes to a large amount of diverse species. They are of special biodiversity importance and of international conservation value.

Marine and coastal habitats

Coastal areas are typically rich in biodiversity. This is the result of the interaction of the wind and waves, working together to shape the rocks and sand and produce a range of niches in which plants and animals can live. Our coastal lands contain a variety of habitats, ranging from the familiar sand dune systems to salt marshes and the rare machair grasslands. Marine and coastal habitats face a number of threats including human population and development pressure, over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution and the introduction of exotic species. Saltmarshes and mudflats are especially important feeding grounds for waders and migrating birds. They are generally associated with mudflats in our major estuaries and sea loughs such as the Broad Water Sea Lough in Mulroy Bay, Co. Donegal.

Woodland

Ireland is one of the least wooded countries in Europe with approximately 9% of its land area covered by forests. Only 1% of forest cover is native woodland, with the remaining 8% mainly non-native coniferous trees. Human disturbance has had the most significant and prolonged impact on native Irish forests. Clearance for agricultural land use and the harvesting of timber for use as fuel wood dramatically reduced native oak and elm woodland cover. Ireland's broadleaf forests support a variety of insects, birds, plants and mammals in their various layers of vegetation from the tree canopy to the leaf litter on the forest floor.

Grasslands

Over 60% of Ireland is covered by grassland of one type or another and this does not include areas covered by annual crops, golf courses and lawns. Grasslands are economically important in Ireland as they account for much of our agricultural production and they also provide vital areas for amenity and tourism. In addition to economically important grassland there are also several grassland types of conservation value, which support diverse plant, invertebrate and animal communities. These include orchid-rich calcareous grasslands, coastal machairs, species-rich and neutral grasslands, and wet grasslands such as the Shannon Callows.

Hedgerows

As there is little native forest in Ireland, hedgerows are an important substitute for woodland edge habitat. They support a large variety of plant and animal life but also provide corridors for wildlife by linking habitats. Most hedgerows originate from planting and typically form field or property boundaries. They commonly support many native and non-native trees and shrubs including ash, hazel, beech, elder and willow, some of which may occur as scattered tall trees. Hedgerows also frequently contain climbing plants such as ivy and honeysuckle. They host a wide range of insect, bird and mammal species and provide networks within which animals can move in safety from one habitat to another. The most significant threats to hedgerows include inappropriate management and clearance of hedgerows for development of land and agricultural expansion.





Case Study

Unique & fascinating habitat—the Burren

The Burren stretches over 260 km² covering varying gradients, from sea level to a height of 300 metres. It is an environmental wonderland composed mainly of limestone, which hides a network of caves and on the surface has been smoothed to form pavements separated by narrow, deep, vertical cracks. While the Burren may seem barren at first glance, in fact, over 70% of Ireland's native flora can be found there including 24 out of 28 native orchid species. The environment supports 600 plant species and is especially unique as Arctic, Alpine and Mediterranean plants grow there side by side.

Conservation of Ireland's biodiversity

Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan sets out a programme of work which aims to conserve species, habitats and genetic diversity, and to promote the sustainable use of biodiversity. The plan emphasises the principle of shared responsibility for environmental protection by all sectors of society including the tourism industry and the general public.

The National Biodiversity Plan for Ireland provides a cohesive policy framework, which incorporates legislative and other measures to protect our flora, fauna and habitats of importance. All Government Departments and sectors are responsible for the delivery of the Plan which includes programmes of work in areas such as agriculture, forestry, marine, inland waters as well as traditional nature conservation.

Much of our domestic policy is influenced by European legislation, most notably the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive and the Water Framework Directive. The Habitats Directive requires Ireland to designate land, known as a Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) where there are species or habitats of European importance. The Birds Directive requires us to designate lands, known as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the habitats of birds of European importance. There are strong measures in place for the protection of both SACs and SPAs, which include strict conditions on any development in or near these sites. Irish legislation set out in the Wildlife Act also includes provision for the designation of National Heritage Areas (NHAs) for sites of Irish importance.

For further information on conservation sites and the implications of site designation see: National Parks and Wildlife Services www.npws.ie or on www.noticenature.ie

Why Is Biodiversity Important To Tourism?

Biodiversity is what makes Ireland the beautiful country it is. It provides us with a wealth of resources for the tourism sector including wonderful scenic landscapes, rivers and lakes, forests and woodlands, habitats, plants and animals. Ireland offers a unique experience to tourists because of our biodiversity and the natural landscape. In a Visitor Attitudes Survey in 2006, 80% of visitors rated Ireland's scenery as a primary reason for visiting Ireland, with 74% stating that they were attracted by the natural unspoilt environment. Furthermore, two in every three visitors who toured the country by car, did so to enjoy the scenery and the natural and cultural heritage attractions Ireland has to offer.

However the scenic landscape is not the only important draw for tourists. For example, Ireland has recently become one of Europe's top whale watching destinations and is also an attractive destination for birdwatchers and outdoor activity enthusiasts. Economically tourism is very important to Ireland. In 2006, the number of overseas tourists visiting Ireland increased to an estimated 7.4 million, tourism total foreign exchange earnings were €4.7 billion and the tourism and hospitality sector supported 12% of jobs in Ireland. To ensure the future success of the industry it is important to safeguard the biodiversity and environmental assets upon which much of the tourism sector is dependent.



Case Study

Conservation Project—Reintroduction of Eagles to Ireland

Over one hundred years ago, eagles, were widespread in Ireland. However, habitat destruction and hunting by humans led to their demise and they became extinct in our country. In recent years there have been various introductory projects to return these magnificent birds of prey to their natural habitats. Following the success of the re-introduction of the Golden Eagle to Donegal six years ago, a programme is currently underway to introduce the White Tailed Eagle to Kerry. These projects are being run by the Golden Eagle Trust and the National Parks and Wildlife Service and are funded by grants from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Heritage Council. The Department and the Golden Eagle Trust have also recently collaborated on a reintroduction programme for another striking bird of prey, the Red Kite, in the Wicklow Mountains National Park. These birds of prey are an exciting addition to our biodiversity and are of great interest to niche tourist markets.

What impact does tourism have on biodiversity?

As with most businesses, tourism operations and activities can directly and indirectly affect our biodiversity. The following overview shows some of the impacts that tourism or related activities may have on biodiversity. Many of the activities outlined below are not solely related to the tourism sector, however seasonality in tourist numbers and the lack of infrastructural capacity to deal with such influxes may result in some added pressure from increased tourist numbers in particular areas.

- Infrastructural services such as waste and water treatment and disposal can be placed under strain if they are not built to deal with increased tourist numbers. Such outcomes include water overuse and excessive production of wastes. This can lead to a potential reduction in environmental and water quality, thus affecting land and water species diversity.
- Congestion, crowding and frequent vehicle use in tourist areas can increase water and air pollution and have adverse impacts on biodiversity and human health.
- Tourism infrastructure / facilities that are poorly planned and located can not only be visually obtrusive, but can be unsuited to local environmental conditions causing destruction to local species habitats and a change in landscape character.
- Tourists who are not aware of local environmental issues or the 'Leave no Trace' principles, may engage in inappropriate behaviour such as roaming off track in ecologically sensitive areas or littering.
- Outdoor recreational activities such as golfing, hill walking, angling and motorised water sports, can also affect biodiversity. For example, the overuse of fertilisers and pesticides on golf courses and in gardens can cause eutrophication of waterbodies. This may lead to death of fish and general loss of water life. Also horse riding and hill walking can cause habitat degradation from repeated use of trails and trampling in fragile ecosystems, particularly where ongoing trail management programmes are not in place. The following section looks at a number of outdoor leisure activities and their potential impacts on biodiversity. It outlines actions that can be taken by the tourism industry to reduce any negative impacts.



Outdoor Leisure Activities

Potential Impacts on Biodiversity

- Over-fishing can result in a depletion in fish stocks
- Unregulated stocking of rivers and lakes can cause an imbalance in ecosystems and can spread infections.
- Water pollution from run-off can negatively affect fishing levels. Many fish are very sensitive to pollution and if a river becomes polluted, it reduces its attraction for fishing.

Actions to help prevent potential impacts

Angling

- Throw back fish that are too small, in accordance with Regional Fisheries Board regulations. Contact the relevant Regional Fisheries Board for conservation information before setting out on a fishing trip.
- Create awareness of areas that need a licence to be fished.
- Be aware of what fish you are allowed to catch and what fish you must return to the water.
- Stocking rivers / lakes with fish that are non-native to that area can cause an imbalance in the ecosystem of the lake/river.
- The Central Fisheries Board has conservation guidelines for each type of fishing. www.cfb.ie
- Shannon Regional Fisheries Board include environmental good practice in with "Angling tips for the Visiting Angler" on their site. www.shannon-fishery-board.ie

Hill walking

- Erosion of walkways due to over-use
- Litter along walkways from users
- Over-picking of plants
- Users wandering off set trails causing habitat damage
- Loss of ground cover

- Smaller groups of walkers will help to minimise erosion of walkways.
- Use managed and prepared trails and encourage walkers not to wander off the track.
- Set out guidelines at the start of walks and nature trails that ask visitors not to pick plants, and to leave nothing behind them.
- Promote the 'Leave No Trace' code of outdoor ethics to all trail users. The seven 'Leave No Trace' principles could be listed on trail-head signage. See page 12 for further details.
- Have routes and trails that change so that you can vary them if signs of erosion are showing on trails in use.
- Trail managers should ensure that active trail management plans are in place.

Equestrian

- Over-use of trails causing erosion and destruction of species in the area.
- Impact (erosion) on sand dunes due to excessive trekking.

- Small groups of horses at one time will help to minimise the impact on the trails.
- Use of a variety of trails, to ensure that no one trail becomes over eroded.
- Ensure that none of the routes you use damages the biodiversity in the area.
- Do not use an area where a visible impact on biodiversity has already begun.
- Promote the 'Leave No Trace' code of outdoor ethics, see page 12.

Potential Impacts on Biodiversity

Actions to help prevent potential impacts

Golfing

- Construction or expansion of golf courses on sensitive areas, especially sand dune sites, where the building work or operation of the golf course would reduce the favourable conservation status of the site, e.g. habitats designated as Special Area of Conservation.
- Use of non native species of flora or fauna
- Over-use of chemicals (fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides), resulting in ground water pollution and damage to flora and fauna species).
- Loss of or fragmentation of habitats.

- If you are planning construction on, or expansion of a golf course, carry out a constraints assessment to identify designated or proposed designated areas. Avoiding development on such sites will facilitate expedient progress of the project and will ensure maximum protection for biodiversity.* Maps depicting such sites are available from the Local Authority or on www.envron.ie
- The better the biodiversity the better the golfing experience - enhance the course with native species, which will encourage other native wildlife to the area.
- Filter storm water and run-off to protect the local water courses and ground water systems.
- Consider developing the diversity of lakes and ponds - this may include activities such as increasing the depth and planting certain native species of flora.
- Post an Environmental Golf Course Etiquette sign in the club house e.g. respect the natural areas of the course, don't litter, etc.
- When developing a new course take into account the habitats and make them a feature of the course rather than fragmenting them by cutting through them.
- Erect bird nest boxes and bat boxes where appropriate.
- Enforce mowing strategies for the rough areas, except for invasive species.
- Reduce the use of chemicals on the land, and/or substitute for more environmentally friendly methods.
- Good environmental practice on golf courses can achieve the ECOManagement award from Golf Environment Europe.

Water sports/Cruising

- The construction of marinas may change the current of a river
- Dumping sewage from boats directly into the water or from oil spills can cause water pollution.
- The transfer of boats from one water body to another can result in the spread of invasive species, e.g. Zebra Mussel.
- Cruising boats and power craft can cause disturbance to flora and fauna, e.g. from excessive boat wash.

- When building a marina ensure that it does not affect the current of the water system or impact negatively on biodiversity either in the water or on-shore
- Ensure that you clean the bottom of your boat thoroughly when moving it across land from one watercourse to another. This prevents the spread on invasive species such as the Zebra Mussel.
- Empty wastewater containers and holding tanks at designated pump-out stations only and not during travel
- Recycling points should be available at all marinas to allow disposal of waste in a responsible manner.
- Ensure that your boat engine is in top condition before you put it in the water so that there is less chance of it leaking oil in to the river.
- Speeding and improper behaviour will not only endanger users of the water, but also disturbs and can kill the animals and plants that live there.

*All planning applications that might have significant effects in relation to nature conservation must be referred to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Where significant negative impacts on nature conservation may not be mitigated, the Department may recommend to the planning authority that planning permission not be granted. Developments that impact negatively on the conservation interests of such sites are likely to be in breach of EU Law.

What You Can Do?

The tourism industry comprises approximately 18,000 small to medium sized enterprises each of which, have the power and responsibility to take action to protect Ireland's biodiversity. It is also critical in preserving the attractiveness of Ireland as a visitor destination. Through raising awareness of biodiversity, devising conservation projects, working with community initiatives, and taking biodiversity into consideration in all activities, tourism businesses, either individually or collectively, can make a positive contribution to the protection of Ireland's natural heritage. Become aware of your local habitats and wildlife, as these can be important marketing tools for your product. By emphasising biodiversity in your area and demonstrating that you are taking action to secure its preservation, your business could gain positive publicity and a competitive advantage over other operators. This section advises on actions that the tourism sector can take to emphasise and enhance biodiversity and to encourage people to enjoy the wildlife around them while at the same time ensuring its protection.

a) Enhance and emphasise biodiversity on-site

When building or developing your site, ensure that you are sensitive to what makes up the landscape and habitats. During development and construction phase, make a concentrated effort to protect biodiversity. This can be done simply by carrying out early scoping studies, combined with a review of whether or not the site is in, within, or near a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a Special Protection Area (SPA), or a Natural Heritage Area (NHA). To find out if your site is near one of these areas, maps are available from your Local Authority or on www.environ.ie.

Information on the protection of biodiversity during the construction phase is set out in 'Wildlife, Habitats & Development; Guidelines for the Protection of Biodiversity in Construction Projects' available from www.noticenature.ie. Assess the biodiversity value of your property taking note of the rare species and the natural features that it incorporates, such as woodlands, rivers and lakes. Make sure that your natural assets are protected and highlighted to draw tourist attention. This could be done by creating leaflets and signs educating visitors on biodiversity on-site. Be careful not to over-use pesticides and fertilisers and try to consider the surrounding environment when choosing landscape designs and gardening techniques. Designated 'wild' areas could be created on your land containing only native plant and tree species left to flourish and not interfered with by gardeners. Bird boxes and bird feeders could be put in place to attract birdlife.

b) Promote awareness of biodiversity among tourists

Be proud of your local area. Use your status as a business within the community to generate awareness amongst tourists of local habitats and species and promote the development of nature parks and trails as an attraction to the locality. Find out if there are any places of special wildlife interest (e.g. National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, Special Areas of Conservation etc.). Learn why they are unique and important and pass on this information to your visitors. Kid's clubs in hotels can focus on local wildlife and habitats and can be an effective means of stimulating interest. The 'Discover Ireland' website contains a wealth of information on out-door and nature related activities and attractions to be found in each of the counties of Ireland (www.discoverireland.ie).

If you join together with other local tourism businesses, a tourist communications strategy could be more easily devised. This could include the provision of information leaflets or the creation of a website designed to promote nature in the area. The Burrenbeo case study illustrates the way in which such actions can be taken.

c) Promote protection of biodiversity among tourists

The natural biodiversity of Ireland has created wonderful landscapes for tourists to explore and enjoy. To ensure that this continues to be the case, visitors must be aware of the need to preserve biodiversity and be encouraged to behave in a manner that ensures the protection of all species, habitats and landscapes.

The 'Leave No Trace' code of outdoor ethics, which are outlined below, are useful in guiding visitor interaction with the environment so as to minimise any negative impacts. Leave No Trace Ireland is an all-Ireland network of organisations and individuals with an interest in promoting the responsible recreational use of the countryside and wild places. Those working in the tourism and biodiversity sectors should help communicate its seven principles to visitors, which are to:

- Plan ahead and prepare for trips checking out access, policies and any equipment needed;
- Be considerate of others especially those who live and work in the countryside;
- Respect farm animals and wildlife ensuring that you do not disturb them;
- Travel and camp on durable ground sticking to existing tracks and campsites where possible;
- Leave what you find respecting property, archaeological sites or artefacts;
- Dispose of waste properly either in the facilities provided or by bringing it home: and
- Minimise the effects of fire that can cause lasting effects on wildlife and farmland.

For further information see: www.leavenotraceireland.org

Case Study

Burrenbeo: Main St, Kinvara, Co. Galway • Ph./FAX (091) 638096 • www.burrenbeo.com • info@burrenbeo.com

Burrenbeo – (the living Burren)

Burrenbeo is a not for profit organisation, established in 2002 based in Kinvara, Co. Galway. The objectives of the project are to promote education and awareness of the Burren, Co. Clare and in particular to acknowledge and support the positive contribution of the local farming community to the natural heritage of the area. Burrenbeo also seeks to promote the Burren as a haven for ecotourism through education and marketing. The 'burrenbeo' multimedia resource website contains information for visitors on the local environment, news and events and local amenities. Through the use of the website and educational courses, Burrenbeo provides an integrated marketing and promotional facility for Burren tourist services and products through the newly developed Burren Business Network. Burrenbeo works closely with a large number of groups including the Clare and Galway local authorities, Leader Clare and Galway, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Heritage Council, Teagasc, Clare County Enterprise Board, Fáilte Ireland and Shannon Development. Future plans for Burrenbeo include the mainstreaming of quality heritage education opportunities in all Burren schools and communities, working with their partners to develop a more sustainable form of 'Eco-Tourism' for the Burren and striving to build on its status as the key provider of quality information for the Burren.

d) Work with your community to develop and promote local conservation projects

Getting involved in biodiversity conservation can be good for business as well as wildlife. Many small-scale local conservation projects exist across Ireland along with nation-wide programmes that are implemented on a local basis such as Tidy Towns, Blue Flag and Green Coast. See what projects exist in your area and promote them to tourists. Tourism businesses can also play a more active part, by helping with conservation projects or by trying to initiate their own.

Tidy Towns

The Tidy Towns competition is a long-established and treasured national competition organised by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Participating towns are rated on all aspects of their local environment and compete for a cash award and the title of "Ireland's Tidiest Town". The Tidy Towns competition has been running in Ireland since 1958 and there are currently 750 Tidy Towns committees across Ireland. Since 2006, there has been a special category of biodiversity award for towns that have undertaken projects to conserve and enhance our local biodiversity. Supporting the Tidy Towns committees in your area can help to protect local biodiversity and participation in the competition will generate positive publicity for your town.

For further information contact:

Tidy Towns Unit – DoEHLG

Ph: (01) 888 2000

www.tidytowns.ie/

Blue Flag

The Blue Flag Programme is one of the most widely recognised and valued ecolabels throughout Europe. It is awarded to beaches and marinas with excellent water quality and environmental management practices. In Ireland, 81 beaches and 3 marinas were awarded 'Blue Flag' status in 2007. To gain a Blue Flag, beaches must comply with best practice in the areas of environmental management, environmental education, and must provide visitor facilities such as toilets, recycling bins, and display boards providing information on the beach ecosystem. To find out if there is a Blue Flag beach in your vicinity and to get involved in the management and conservation of Blue Flag beaches, contact your Local Authority Environmental Awareness Officer.

For more information see:

Blue flag

www.blueflag.org

Clean Coasts Project: Coastal Care Groups & Green Coast Award

The Clean Coasts project is an Irish/Welsh partnership between An Taisce in Ireland and Keep Wales Tidy. It comprises two key elements, the Green Coast Award and Coastal Care Groups and is part funded by the EU Interreg IIIA.

The Green Coast Award

The Green Coast Award is aimed at smaller, more rural beaches that are not eligible for the Blue Flag as they do not have the necessary infrastructure or facilities in place. It acknowledges beaches that meet the EC bathing water quality standards as well as meeting 13 other community and environmental objectives. Currently, 13 beaches in Ireland have been awarded the Green Coast Award.

Coastcare

Coastcare comprises voluntary groups who have formed to take action to care for their local beaches. The groups are supported by Clean Coast staff who provide advice and training and can help them avail of small grants for proposed projects. Volunteers are involved in the preservation and improvement of coastlines and undertake many activities relating to beach clean-up, environmental awareness raising, dune protection, and dune watch.

To get involved in Coastcare activities or to find out more about the Green Coast Award, see:

www.cleancoastproject.org/

Or contact:

Clean Coast Project Officer

An Taisce Environment Education Unit

Tel: 01 4002220 / 01 4002221

cleancoast1@antaisce.org

e) Eco-Labels and Eco-Management

There are a number of different eco-labels available in the tourism sector which can be used by tourism businesses to let visitors and guests know that the operation is achieving high standards of environmental management and has been certified as such by a competent authority. The 'EU Flower' eco-label, which is promoted by the European Commission, is available for the tourist accommodation sector, and the ECOManagement award, promoted by Golf Environment Europe, is an eco-label available for golf courses. Each label provides a process through which an accommodation provider or a golf course can measure its current environmental impact and can set targets to reduce that impact to agreed levels. The achievement of the standard of environmental good practice demanded by each of these eco-labels can result in significant cost savings for the operator in terms of the reduction of overheads.

The European Eco-Label for Tourist Accommodation and Campsite Services

The European Eco-label has been created to signal high environmental performance in all kinds of accommodation from campsites to large hotel chains. It is a European Commission initiative and is the only sign of environmental quality that is both valid throughout Europe and certified by an independent organisation. To receive the Eco-Label, applicants must conform to certain criteria and undertake a number of measures to improve their eco-performance. The key criteria relate to the implementation of measures on; water saving, energy efficiency and renewable energy, waste separation and disposal, reduced usage of chemical substances and the promotion of environmental communication and education. Accommodation providers should also increase use of local sustainable products. Once the criteria have been met a 'Flower Logo' is awarded to the accommodation providers.

Benefits of the EU Flower Eco-Label

- Official and reliable trademark – Display of logo guarantees high environmental performance and is recognisable across the EU.
- Logo can be used in marketing - this can increase credibility and show your commitment to providing environmentally friendly tourist accommodation.
- Opportunity to improve customer satisfaction – guests are reassured that their stay will have a low environmental impact.
- Increased competitive advantage – opportunity to enter into the ever growing market for eco-friendly holidays and accommodation .
- Potential cost savings - implementation of eco-efficiency measures such as the reduction of energy consumption will have cost benefits in the long term.
- Health benefits for employees and guests – healthy environment, less chemical use and emphasis on local, organic produce.



- Compliance with Eco-Label standards reduces the impact of your service on the local environment and will therefore help ensure the preservation of biodiversity in the area.
- Good ecological management will help to reduce over-use of natural resources, and will result in a reduction in the use of abrasive chemicals for cleaning and will conserve water.

How to apply?

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is the competent authority for the administration of the EU Flower eco-label in Ireland. Information packs and application forms are available from the NSAI.

National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI)

Glasnevin, Dublin 9

Tel: +353 1 8073908

Fax: +353 1 8073844

nsai@nsai.ie

www.nsai.ie

Further information on Eco-Label: www.ecolabel-tourism.eu

Golf Environment Europe (GEE)

Golf Environment Europe is a non-profit organisation working to promote environmental sustainability in golf. The website has a wealth of information relating to golf and the environment including technical information on implementing environmental management systems, greening golf events and new golf course development.

Golf Environment Europe - ECOManagement Programme

The ECOManagement programme encourages registration and accreditation via the European Commission Eco Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). The GEE ECOManagement programme provides an umbrella for national environmental management and certification systems. It is an accessible system through which all golf clubs can build their environmental programmes and provides an interface and a stepping stone towards EMAS. GEE ECOManagement Programme is open to all sizes of golf facility on a voluntary basis. The programme emphasises continual improvement and encourages golf courses to take steps to become EMAS accredited.

The Irish Golf Course Ecosystems Project is part of the Golf Environment Europe's ECO Management Programme. This project aims to address the need for a balanced and holistic approach to golf tourism development and nature conservation, and facilitate further development of ecologically sound management systems for golf courses in Ireland. The project has been commissioned by the Golfing Union of Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of Ireland, and is coordinated and implemented by CKES Environmental Services.



Ecotourism

Ecotourism is an emerging tourism market segment which appears to have significant growth potential in Ireland. The eco sector is becoming more popular with consumers and eco-products are increasingly becoming associated with quality and are commanding high prices. Ecotourism provides new business opportunities for accommodation providers, caterers and leisure resorts which could capitalise on this potential. Ecotourism has been defined as:

“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people”. (TIES, 2005)

In short, all ecotourism must have a positive impact on both natural areas and the local community. According to the International Ecotourism Society (TIES – www.ecotourism.org), this means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should do so in accordance with the following principles:

- Minimise impact;
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect;
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts;
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation; and
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.

A clear distinction should be made between the concept of sustainable tourism and ecotourism. This distinction has been highlighted by the Quebec Declaration, which stated that ecotourism embraces the principles of sustainable tourism but is distinguished from sustainable tourism in the following ways:

- It contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage;
- It includes local communities in its planning, development and operation, contributing to their well-being;
- It interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to the visitor;
- It lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to organised tours for small groups.

(World Ecotourism Summit, Quebec, 2002)



Case Study **The Greenbox**

The Greenbox is Ireland's first integrated ecotourism destination. Established in 2002 by the Western Development Commission, it is a cross-border project, funded by INTERREG, the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, Irish Central Border Area Network, Pobal, Leitrim County Council, the Combat Poverty Agency, and the Western Development Commission.

The Greenbox is one of the flagship projects of the inter-agency supported Western Development Tourism Programme (WDTP), which is an attempt to create integrated and sustainable tourism development in the under-performing regions of the west of Ireland. The long-term objective is to facilitate the creation a world-class ecotourism destination in the west, established on the principles of social, economic and environmental sustainability (WDTP, 2003).

The Green Box aims to deliver environmentally sustainable tourism products, accommodation and attractions. Such tourism activity will have minimal impact on the ecology of the area, be of maximum benefit to the local communities and meet the needs of the environmentally conscious visitor. The Green Box encompasses an area covering all of Leitrim and Fermanagh and parts of Donegal, Sligo and Cavan.

The Greenbox promotes travel which is small scale, low impact, culturally sensitive and community orientated, and provides a marketing tool for businesses that are grounded in sustainable principles and practices within the Greenbox area. The concept is broader than the established definition of tourism, embracing activities such as organic food production, rural transport, energy and waste management. The Greenbox also provides grant aid to tourism related businesses and community groups in the area for the improvement of environmental performance for new ecotourism products.

The Greenbox Network provides advice, guidance and support to its members and has enabled accommodation providers to commit to the achievement of the prestigious European Eco-label for tourist accommodation services (the EU Flower).

For further information see: www.greenbox.ie



Conclusion

These guidelines have provided an overview of biodiversity in Ireland, outlining its importance and the key threats to our flora, fauna and habitats. They have elaborated the impact that tourism has on biodiversity through its related production processes, products and services. Taking such actions that have been outlined in these guidelines can help to safeguard and enhance the country's natural assets upon which the tourism industry is so dependent. It is important that the future development of Irish tourism is matched to current market conditions which show an ever growing number of environmentally conscious consumers and demand for holidays relating to local culture, physical and emotional wellbeing and soft adventure.

To summarise, in order to ensure the future development and improvement of tourism in Ireland, while reducing its impact on biodiversity, all those engaged in tourism should try to:

- Promote local wildlife and habitats to tourists;
- Encourage sustainable tourist interaction with the environment. This can be done by providing information on the 'Leave no Trace' principles and through the development of appropriately located and managed trails to protect sensitive habitats;
- Consider the conservation of habitats during the design and construction phase of development work;
- Engage with local environmental groups and local development boards to get involved with projects aimed at the protection and enhancement of local biodiversity (e.g. Tidy Towns & Coastcare groups);
- Promote and help in the achievement of eco-labels such as the Blue Flag and Green Coasts;
- Enhance the environmental management aspect of your business, focusing on reduction of waste generation, water and energy usage. Where possible, use certified sustainable building materials;
- Consider applying for the EU Flower Eco-label and getting involved in the Golf Environment Europe ECOManagement Programme; and
- Consider eco-tourism as a possible area for business development

Together with the range of other business sectors, tourism businesses, either individually or collectively have the power and responsibility to protect Ireland's biodiversity. Through taking some of the actions outlined in these guidelines, a positive contribution can be made to the protection of Ireland's natural heritage and to the sustainable development and prosperity of the tourism industry.

The Role of Fáilte Ireland's Environment Unit

In 2005, Fáilte Ireland set up an Environment Unit with the following functions:

- To advocate a high quality physical environment for tourism and to promote good environmental practice throughout the tourism sector;
- To influence the formulation of national tourism policy so that it takes account of the principles of sustainable development;
- To provide information and advice to Planning Authorities when they are preparing their Development Plans and Litter Management Plans.

Fáilte Ireland has recently launched a three-year Environmental Action Plan 2007-2009. There are five key objectives at the core of the Action Plan:

1. Place environmental issues at the core of sustainable tourism policy at national, regional and local levels.
2. Advocate for the protection of key environmental and tourism assets.
3. Undertake research leading to a clearer understanding of the relationship between tourism and the environment.
4. Promote good environmental practice within the tourism sector and advise on the development of ecotourism.
5. Work with strategic partners to implement the Environmental Action Plan.

Further information about the Environment Unit and a copy of Fáilte Ireland's Environmental Action Plan 2007-2009 can be found on its website at www.failteireland.ie.

Fáilte Ireland and Notice Nature

Notice Nature has been supported by Fáilte Ireland in raising awareness of the role of the tourism sector in the protection and sustainable use of Ireland's Biodiversity. In particular, Fáilte Ireland has participated in the development of these guidelines.



Fáilte Ireland

