

## Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Rathanna Sligo Town



Collated in consultation with Rathanna Residents.  
by Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd.

Part of the Parks Quarter Biodiversity Training Programme.

Client: Sligo Tidy Towns  
March 2023



## Acknowledgements

This Local Biodiversity Action Plan was developed from input by residents from Rathanna Residential Area in collaboration with Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd (Woodrow). Woodrow would like to acknowledge and thank all the residents who gave up their time to meet and share their thoughts and ideas.

This was part of a wider programme of training and development programme for residential communities of south Sligo Town in the area known as 'The Parks Quarter'.

The funding for this project was provided by the EU LEADER fund, following an application from Sligo Tidy Towns. Sligo Tidy Towns part funded the project.

**Front Page Image:** The green at Rathanna, Sligo Town.

**Source:** All pictures used are property of Woodrow unless otherwise stated.

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## Aims of participation in the Park's Quarter Biodiversity programme

The aim of participation in this programme is to educate, enable and encourage local residents to create more biodiverse areas in their gardens and communal areas.

## How this programme and Local Biodiversity Action Plan was developed

Sligo Tidy Towns secured EU LEADER funding in 2022 to deliver a biodiversity training programme for communities across the Park's Quarter of Sligo Town. Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd (Woodrow) won the tender to deliver this training for Sligo Tidy Towns.

Residents of Rathanna were contacted to determine if they were interested in being involved. Having expressed an interest, the residents of Rathanna joined this programme.

This action plan was collated specifically for this group. It lists suitable ideas for enhancing and making residents more aware of local biodiversity. The proposed actions are relatively cheap and should be achievable by the community.

## Existing Biodiversity in Rathanna

There are around 20 residential homes in Rathanna, which is located to the south of Sligo town. The communal green space is composed of two triangular lawns in the centre of the estate (600m<sup>2</sup> approx.). This forms the primary communal space (Figure 1). It is where the residents expressed their wishes for the biodiversity actions to be taken.



**Figure 1:** The centrally located green spaces of Rathanna residential area

**Source:** <https://earth.google.com/web/>

A number of semi-mature broadleaf trees decorate the site. The trees lend structure to the space, as well as seasonal interest, and most importantly for this project they provide good habitat for nesting birds and a variety of native insects. Tree species include; ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), and willow (*Salix spp.*) (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** A variety of broadleaf trees can be seen at Rathanna estate.

A number of shrubs are also present which lend structure to the planting plan, including New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax*), hydrangea (*Hydrangea* spp.), and cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster* spp.) (Figure 3 and 4).



**Figure 3:** A herbaceous border showing some evergreen shrubs which will provide interest throughout the year



**Figure 4:** A herbaceous border showing a variety of ornamental plants including hosta (*Hosta* spp.) and poppies (*Papaver* spp.)



**Figure 5:** A variety of herbaceous species are planted here including primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), daffodils (*Narcissus* spp.)

Frequent mowing of the lawn prevents a variety of wild plant species from growing in the communal area. As such, it is of low conservation importance. Changes to grassland management can improve the biodiversity potential of the space and shall be discussed in detail in coming chapters.

## Summary of Actions to enhance biodiversity in Rathanna

This is a summary of the proposed enhancement activities for the Rathanna Residential Area to create more biodiversity.

No.	Proposed Action	Proposed location / method of action
1	Remove overgrown willow tree.	The fresh growth on the willow tree can easily exceed 1m per year and as such this large tree requires continued maintenance. A tree surgeon can remove this tree completely.
2	Remove or prune Ash tree.	A tree surgeon can assess the extent of the ash dieback and prune or remove the tree as suitable.
3	Replace removed trees with appropriate native trees.	Smaller trees are more suitable for estates and urban areas. The rowan tree offers seasonal interest and provides flowers for pollinators and fruits for birds.
4	Leave piles of leaves in a quiet corner.	To increase habitat for hedgehogs and insect pollinators over winter months while they are hibernating.
5	Erect bird boxes.	Whilst there are only a small number of mature trees in Rathanna, some bird boxes could be erected on these trees, and possibly in gardens where appropriate to provide shelter for garden birds.
6	Erect bird feeders or grow your own bird feeders!	Put up bird feeders in gardens, and supply water in the winter. Or indeed grow flowers, such as sun flowers.
7	Build and erect bat boxes.	Bat boxes can be installed in trees or on the outside of buildings providing habitat for bat roosts. Careful night-time lighting, and provision of habitats and food, can increase the population of these protected mammals.
8	Plant pollinator-friendly shrubs and ornamental plants.	Pollinator-friendly shrubs such as heathers, berberis, mahonia and firethorn are low maintenance. Pollinator-friendly ornamental plants require more maintenance but can look wonderful, such as salvias, asters, aliums. Bulbs such as crocus, grape hyacinth and snowdrops are also pollinator-friendly.
9	Encourage safe disposal of oils/paints/toiletries.	Due to the proximity of the estate to Lough Gill, a site of European importance for wildlife and its habitats, residents could be encouraged to safely dispose of oil/paints and toiletries so that storm drains are not blocked, or to ensure harmful chemicals do not reach these special areas.

## Proposed Training & Workshop Summary

This is a table of training the residents were interested in receiving. This will form part of a wider programme of workshops and training activities to be delivered for the wider South Sligo Parks Quarter.

Proposed Workshop/walk / Talk	
Deliver a seed-collection and cuttings Workshop.	This workshop will focus on how to save money by collecting seeds, and also how to grow plants from cuttings. The practical elements of gathering, storing and propagating seeds will also be covered.
Deliver a Low-maintenance pollinator-friendly planting workshop.	This workshop will discuss low-maintenance planting schemes.
Bees and Pollinators Workshop.	This workshop will discuss the difference between social and solitary bees, their life-cycle, behavior, habitat preferences, and sources of food.
Activity workshop/s.	Create bird boxes or bat boxes or bird feeders.
Garden Bird Workshop.	This workshop could cover the basics of visual and aural bird identification for common garden visitors. It will also highlight their resource requirements.
Bat walk & workshop.	This workshop will cover the basics of bat ecology, including life-cycle, bat behaviour, and habitat requirements. The workshop would include an educational sunset bat walk using handheld equipment for species identification.
Tree planting activity/workshop.	Most cost-effective for community groups is using bare-root trees.

## Details of the proposed actions for biodiversity and resources

This Local Biodiversity Action Plan LBAP includes a lot of actions that would help the community connect with nature and help support local biodiversity directly. Increasing plant diversity is often the first step in this process as flowers provide food for pollinating insects and fruits provide food for our birds. Mature trees provide habitat for insects, birds, and bats. All these interrelated relationships create the wider ecosystem.

Ireland is now following the second All Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) which runs from 2021-2025. There is great free information, posters and resources at the website [www.pollinators.ie](http://www.pollinators.ie). There are many simple actions outlined in the AIPP that communities can undertake to reverse declines in biodiversity. Many of the proposed actions detailed in this section link directly to those proposed in the AIPP. An excellent resource is this community action booklet: [https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Local-Communities\\_actions-to-help-pollinators-July-2021-WEB-JB.pdf](https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Local-Communities_actions-to-help-pollinators-July-2021-WEB-JB.pdf)

The competition handbook for TidyTown's community is also packed with great advice for communities:

<https://www.tidytowns.ie/competition/handbook/>



*Image shows section from 'Gardens: actions to help pollinators'*

Source: [https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Gardens\\_actions-to-help-pollinators-July-2016.pdf](https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Gardens_actions-to-help-pollinators-July-2016.pdf)

### Action 1: Remove the Overgrown Willow Tree

There is a large willow tree planted in the center of the main green area. This tree can grow at least 1m in a single growing season. As such, regular pruning by a professional tree surgeon is required. This maintenance is expensive. Indeed, the tree responds to this continued coppicing by putting out fresh new growth at a rapid rate. As such, the best solution here is to remove the willow tree entirely. Residents have expressed support for this action.



**Figure 6:** The large Willow tree can be seen in the centre back of the image. The infected ash tree can be seen in the middle right of the image.

### Action 2: Remove or Prune Ash tree

The ash tree is infected with dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) disease. This causes defoliation of the canopy and can make the tree unstable. A tree surgeon can assess the risk this tree poses to the public. It may be that the best course of action is to remove this tree completely from the site. A professional will carry out all the necessary health and safety checks along with appropriate aftercare to prevent regrowth. Furthermore, they will follow procedures related to preventing further spread of the disease, such as disinfecting equipment after use.

The New Zealand flax at the base of the ash tree could also be removed in favor of a native shrub such as guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*) or spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*), depending on residents' wishes in this regard (Figure 3).

### Action 3: Replace Removed Trees with Native Trees

As this biodiversity action plan proposes the removal of these two semi-mature broadleaf trees, it is important that they are replaced. It is suggested that these trees are replaced with native tree species which have a comparatively smaller ultimate height. Such trees are more suitable for urban planting. For example, the rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) provides flowers in the summer for pollinators and berries in the autumn for birds. Similarly, silver birch (*Betula pendula*) provides interest during the months of spring when its catkins appear and throughout winter when the white bark is most striking.

### Action 4: Leave Piles of Leaves in Quiet Corners

Piles of leaves can provide appropriate habitat for hedgehogs over winter months while they are hibernating. Such habitat is also essential for the life-cycle of many insects. The leaves can be gathered from under the deciduous trees during the autumn months. Fallen branches and sticks can also be added to these piles. They can then be piled and left at the base of the hedges - away from disturbances.

### Action 5: Erect Bird Boxes.

Participants can support local populations of small birds by putting up bird boxes. They could be placed in back gardens or on the few mature trees in the green. Aim to have them up before the breeding season (by March). They can also be left out all year, providing shelter and a place to roost in the winter.

They should be positioned out of direct sunlight – best facing north or south-east; and away from areas where cats can easily access them. We often see these placed too high, or poorly made with entrance holes too large for the target species. If bird feeders are placed near a nest-box, the nesting bird will spend a lot of energy defending its territory – so please don't.

There is a great information page with lots of FAQs about bird boxes:

<https://birdwatchireland.ie/irelands-birds-birdwatch-ireland/garden-birds/nestboxes/>

A possible workshop in collaboration with a local Men's Shed could provide opportunity to show families how to assemble pre-cut parts to make a bird box.

This is also an easy template on how to make your own bird box and can be downloaded at:

<https://birdwatchireland.ie/irelands-birds-birdwatch-ireland/nestbox-designs-for-birds-and-wildlife/>

### Action 6: Erect Bird Feeders or Grow them!

The RSPB (UK Wild bird conservation charity) recommends feeding birds throughout the year, not just in the winter. Feeders are a great way to get close-up views of birds. There are many different types of feeders— including ones that fit onto windows, that are perfect for excellent views. You can also make your own bird tables. Just place them quite high, away from cats, and not too exposed.

It is important to keep feeders clean and to prevent transfer of diseases. Move them if birds are not attracted to them. Sweep up any debris under feeders also. A lot of money is spent on buying bird food so try and ensure you know it comes from a good, environmentally responsible source.

Expert guidance on feeding birds can be found at the following website:

<https://birdwatchireland.ie/irelands-birds-birdwatch-ireland/garden-birds/feeding-your-garden-birds/>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/open-a-bird-cafe/>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/feeding-birds/when-to-feed-garden-birds/>

Many ask **what** should we feed birds: They should receive good quality food, for example, high-fat foods are beneficial in the winter. Do not feed birds:

- Salty foods; Loose peanuts, Cooked food or Bread.

Or indeed grow your own bird food in the form of sunflowers! Many flowers, shrubs and plants look wonderful in gardens and are also a great source of food for birds. During the Autumn and Winter months birds will forage on nutrient-rich high-calorie seed heads. Many of these species also provide a spectacular display in the summer months providing resources for pollinators. As such, they are multifunctional.

Some examples of species which produce attractive seed-heads for birds include; teasel, (*Dipsacus fullonum*), Sea holly (*Eryngium spp.*), Globe thistle (*Echinops spp.*), Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*), Rudbeckia (*Rudbeckia spp.*), Turkish sage (*Phlomis russeliana*), Hyssop (*Agastache spp.*). Further information can be found at the Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds (RSPB) available at: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/leave-seedheads-standing/>

The seedheads of these species should not be cut back at the end of the growing season. Instead, they should be left to decay in-situ. This provides natural bird feeders all through the cooler winter months.

## Action 7: Erect Bat Boxes

These flying mammals are amazing animals. Like humans, they are warm blooded and suckle their young with milk. Some can eat up to 3000 midges a night. Bats are under threat through loss of habitat - meaning they have less food and shelter. Other pressures on local bat populations include the use of pesticides and increased light pollution at night. Residents of Rathanna can easily make a difference by providing shelter through provision of bat boxes.

Bat boxes can be installed in trees or on the outside of buildings providing habitat for bats to roost. In the Summer pregnant bats gather together to have their young. The offspring and female bats stay together in 'maternity roosts' until late Summer. Insulated boxes are better for winter hibernation roosts.

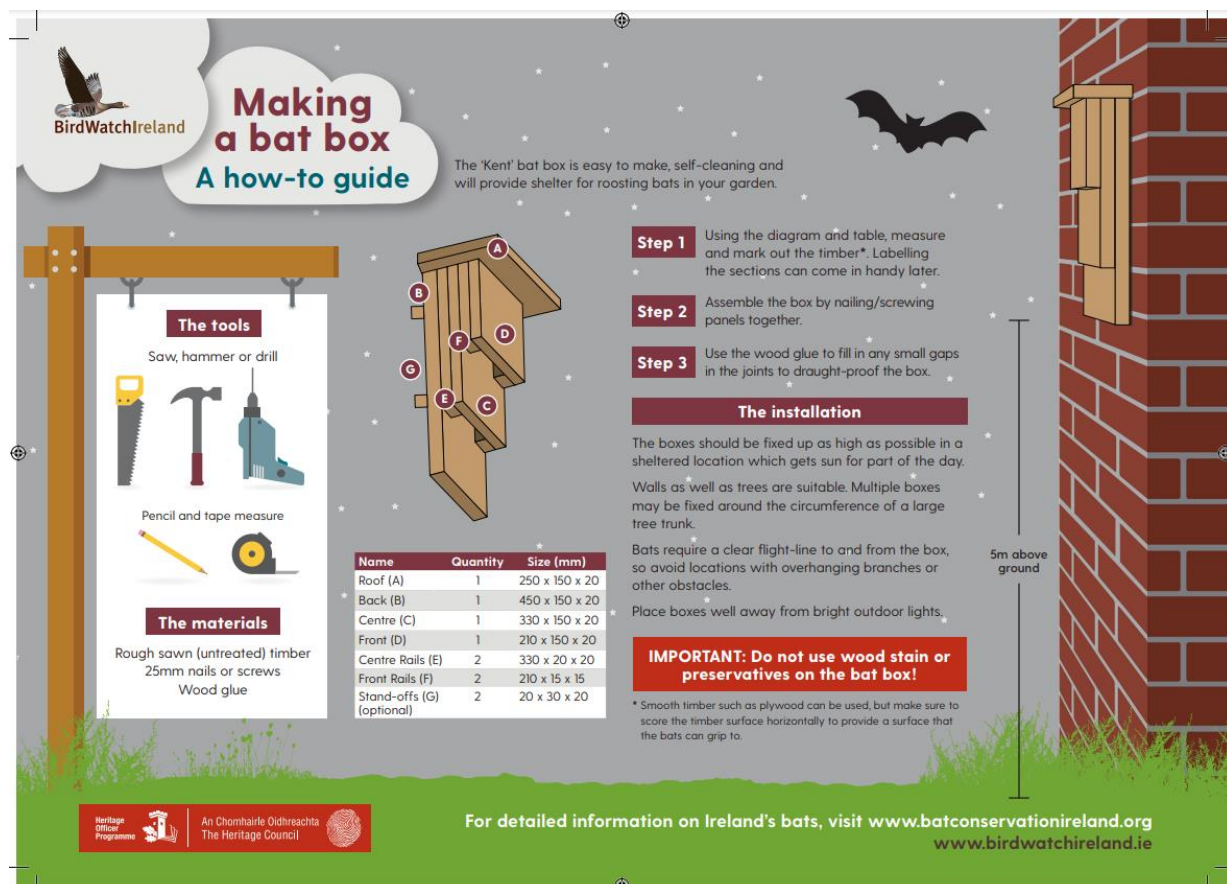


Image shows the great leaflet prepared by Bat Conservation Ireland detailing how to make basic wooden bat boxes and how to put them up.

[https://www.batconservationireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Leaflet\\_3\\_batboxes.pdf](https://www.batconservationireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Leaflet_3_batboxes.pdf)

### Action 8: Pollinator Friendly Plants

Even the smallest garden can plant a pot for pollinators. If the residents of Rathanna planted one pollinator-friendly plant in their front gardens, there would be a chain or necklace of feeding points for pollinators all around the estate. There are many pollinator-friendly shrubs that look great in gardens, such as berberis, firethorn, heathers and mahonia. It could be that some of these shrubs are also grown on the bank in the middle of the communal area.

Many communities plant daffodils or tulips to provide colour in the Spring. But these bright flowers offer little food for pollinators. It is recommended communities plant bulbs such as crocuses and snowdrops. They provide nectar and pollen in late Winter/early Spring when there is little else available for pollinators. The beauty of planting bulbs is that they will flower year-on-year.

The ideal time to plant these bulbs is in November so they will flower the following February/March. They can be planted in most places – along edges of green areas, in rock gardens, under trees. This would be a nice activity for volunteers to get involved with in the estate. The most appropriate place for these bulbs is likely alongside the current display of colourful bulbs (Figure 5). This way the supplementary planting will complement and enhance what is already present onsite.

There are a wide variety of other ornamental garden plants which are beneficial to pollinators. Residents can select species from the guidelines prepared by the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (see below). These can provide a multitude of colour throughout the growing season.



*Image shows a flyer depicting pollinator friendly plants*

Source: <https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AIPP-A5-Flyer-Garden-2022-PRINT.pdf>

### Action 9: Encourage safe disposal of oils/paints/toiletries.

Many household chemicals are harmful to the environment. It is important to safely dispose of these to ensure they are not unintentionally introduced to the environment.