

LOOP HEAD

Nature & Wildlife Monitoring Program

The Loop Head peninsula is one of Ireland's major yet underrated nature areas. Our unique location between the open Atlantic to the north and the shelter of the Shannon Estuary to the south has created a variety of coastal habitats which are home to a wide variety of plants and animals including our very own Shannon Dolphins, visiting basking sharks, numerous birds and an astounding array of wildflowers.

Even the peninsula's interior, though heavily farmed, has its wildlife havens in the form of old stone walls and hedgerows which become ever more important for wildflowers, insects and birds.

Why the Monitoring Program?

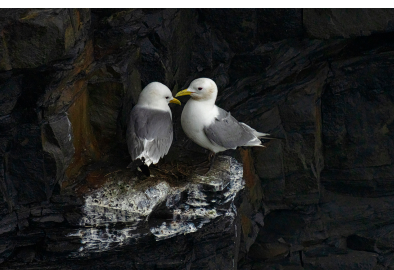
The terms *mass extinction* and *biodiversity crisis* have been making the rounds for a good while now and every day plants and animals are being declared extinct or close to extinction.

Loop Head is in the fortunate position to host a number of species that are being affected by this crises, yet to most of us they are a common sight: Kittiwake, razorbill, snipe, redshank and even the ubiquitous oystercatcher are all red listed species in danger of extinction. Other familiar birds like chough, skylark, brent goose, starling, shag, fulmar and many others are also of conservation concern with numbers decreasing year on year.

The situation is similar for wildflowers and other plants: The yellow horned poppy and early marsh orchid, both of which can be found on Loop Head, are only two of the species that are slowly disappearing mainly due to the loss of habitat.

Most of us would agree that we have to do our very best to preserve the wildlife we still have and the first step to do this is knowing our plants and animals. This is why we have started the *Loop Head Nature & Wildlife Monitoring Program*. We need to know which plants and animals can be found on Loop Head and in what numbers they are present. Only with this knowledge will we notice if a population is growing or declining and only then can we take measures to further protect a particular plant or animal.

The fulmar is a good example. Only a few decades ago the fulmar was one of the most abundant seabirds in the north Atlantic and here in Ireland this bird still appears to be common. Yearly counts however show that numbers are declining, a trend barely noticeable to the casual observer, and without dedicated counts this trend could have gone unnoticed. This phenomenon of not noticing what happens right in front of us has become known as *Shifting Baseline Syndrome*. In the case of the fulmar this means that we subconsciously adapt to the slightly lower numbers every year, accept these as the new normal and as a consequence a species could disappear over the period of only a few decades without anybody noticing.



How to monitor?

Wildlife monitoring is not difficult. All you need is an open eye, maybe a pair of binoculars or a hand loupe and a good identification guide. It also doesn't matter where you start monitoring. You can visit the seabird colonies at Loop Head or explore the grassy patch right outside your front door.

Any wildlife matters, the slug in your garden is equally important as one of the Shannon Dolphins and we need the silverweed as much as we need the early marsh orchid.

While there are strict guidelines for official biodiversity surveys, we have decided not to overcomplicate things. For the *Loop Head Nature & Wildlife Monitoring Program* we have teamed up with *Biodiversity Ireland* and all you need to do is to identify your subject and submit what is known as the 4 W's:

Who:

Recorder's Name

When:

Date of Observation

Where:

Location Name, County & Spatial Reference. This can be done easily on the Biodiversity Ireland website

What:

Species Name in English and Latin. This can also be easily done on the Biodiversity Ireland website, all you need is the English name, the Latin name will automatically be added.

To submit your sighting please complete the following steps:

- Go to: <https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/login>
- Use login email: wildloophead@gmail.com
- After clicking *Sign In* you will be asked to check your email.
- Login to Google Gmail with wildloophead@gmail.com (Password: WildLoopHead), open the latest email from Biodiversity Ireland and click on the *Sign In* link.
- On your first login into the Gmail account you will need a code to register your phone, pad or computer which will be send to the email account administrator. Please email carstenkrieger@hotmail.com or text 0876949385 to get your code.
- The link in the Biodiversity Ireland email will bring you to our account on the Biodiversity Ireland website and there you can submit your sightings by following the instructions on the page.
- To see previous recordings for Loop Head click on *View my Records*.
- It is important to login to the Wild Loop Head account, otherwise recordings will just be added to the general database and we won't be able to review sightings specific to Loop Head.



What has been done so far?

Last year the *Loop Head Together for Nature* group has started monitoring a number of key sites which are of particular interest for wildlife:

- Loop Head: The bird colonies between Dermot & Grania's Rock and Gull Island and the areas of maritime heath east of the lighthouse.
- Ross Bay and the cove below the Bridges of Ross parking area where we are focussing on fauna and flora of the intertidal zone.
- Rinevella and Kilcredaun which host a variety of very different habitats.
- Querrin mudflat, saltmarsh and sandspit which will host Loop Head's first Nature Observation Point.

In the near future we hope to also start monitoring the following areas:

- Pollock Holes in Kilkee.
- Loop Head's northern coast in general.
- The mudflats and saltmarshes of Poulnasherry Bay.
- Hedgerows in Doonaha which are part of a *Biodiversity Way* project.



What is the long term plan?

In addition to ongoing monitoring we hope to establish community run nature reserves and run small scale rewilding projects, e.g. planting of hedgerows and small woodlands and the reintroduction of species rich hay meadows which will support insects and birds including endangered species like the curlew. Training courses and lectures are also planned and a special Nature & Wildlife Monitoring Program for schools is currently in development.



What will be the benefits?

The landscape and its wildlife are Loop Head's greatest asset and hold a huge potential to develop Loop Head into one of Europe's top destinations for nature tourism.

By monitoring and protecting the landscape, plants and animals we are not only battling climate change and biodiversity loss, we can also create employment on the peninsula. Nature tours and courses organized and run by a group of local guides, a nature interpretive centre and purpose built nature and photography hides are just some of the ideas that could create a constant and sustainable revenue stream.



To learn more about Loop Head's nature and wildlife have a look at www.wildloophead.com and its associated social media channels. If you have any questions about the monitoring program email Carsten Krieger @ carstenkrieger@hotmail.com and if you want to get involved into current and future projects you can join the Loop Head Together for Nature WhatsApp group by texting John Aston @ 0852153765.