

# BurrenLIFE Project

burren  
LIFE

## Annual Newsletter



Issue No. 1

Autumn/Winter 2005

### Introduction

Welcome to the first Annual Newsletter of the BurrenLIFE Project. During the lifetime of the Project annual newsletters will be produced together with special reports on key aspects of the work of the BurrenLIFE Project. The newsletters will be widely available and will form a key part of the Projects' overall communication and heritage education strategy.

### Background to the BurrenLIFE Project

The Burren is one of the most important and best-known landscapes in Europe. It is a unique place, unlike anywhere else. Not only is it a landscape of outstanding beauty, but also one of great interest due to the wealth of its natural and cultural heritage. As a result, much of the Burren has been designated for conservation under the EU Habitats Directive. In total five Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC) covering 47,000ha have been designated. Three of these – the East Burren Complex, the Black Head-Poulsallagh Complex and Moneen Mountain are the focus of the BurrenLIFE Project. They contain a range of very important geological features: cave networks, disappearing lakes known as 'turloughs', glacial 'erratics' shaped by glaciers and dropped on the land when the ice retreated, and some of the best and most extensive limestone pavements anywhere in the world. The Burren also contains a huge number of monuments – from wedge tombs, dolmens and forts, to more recent stone houses and animal enclosures. However the Burren is probably most famous for its flowers – three quarters of all of Ireland's native flowers are found here, including most of the Irish orchid species. In turn these flowers support a huge number of insects including butterflies and moths.

Most of what is valued in the Burren has been shaped by the elements and by thousands of years of farming activity. Traditional farming – tight winter grazing by hardy store cattle with little in the way of supplementary feeding – is no longer sustainable. This has been replaced by farming which involves continental cattle breeds, suckler cows, silage feeding and slated houses. This has resulted in many winterages being under-grazed and flowers are losing out to tough grasses and scrub. Many farmers have left the land. The lack of once plentiful farm labour and time for cattle herding due to farmers working off-farm, has resulted in degradation of habitats through changes in grazing levels, expansion of scrub, land abandonment and the loss of important land management practices. Consequently, different land use practices have to be examined and introduced to ensure that these Burren habitats are not lost. This will require the research and development of new, integrated, systems for the agricultural management of the Burren. The BurrenLIFE Project is addressing these concerns by working closely with farmers and drawing on their knowledge and skills. The Project is investigating the best ways of farming the Burren through a programme of practical research.

Together with its partners in the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Teagasc and Burren IFA, the Project hopes to develop a 'Blueprint' for farming in the Burren. Research will focus on ways of minimising farm inputs and optimising farm outputs and in ensuring the land is managed as efficiently and as effectively as possible. This will benefit both the habitats of the Burren and the farmers who manage them.



Wedge Tomb – Highlighting the Cultural Wealth of the Burren



Cattle on the high Burren Winterages

### Objectives of the Project

The overall objective of the Project is to develop a new model for sustainable agriculture in the Burren in order to conserve the habitats designated under the European Habitats Directive. To achieve this an ambitious programme, with a range of Project Actions, has been developed, including:

- Implementing best-known management practices on 2,000ha of the Burren, including new feeding systems, redeployment of existing livestock and targeted scrub removal.
- Increasing understanding of the relationship between land management practices and the natural heritage of the Burren.
- Developing new support mechanisms for the sustainable management of the Burren habitats.
- Enhancing awareness and skills relating to the heritage of the Burren and its management through a range of practical initiatives aimed at empowering local communities.
- Disseminating information relating to the agricultural management of areas of high nature and cultural conservation value through literature and the media.



# Key Conservation Issues Being Addressed

This is a partnership-based 'Farming for Conservation' project. It is one of only six EU funded LIFE projects in Ireland and one of the most important as it engages farmers directly in actively 'farming for conservation' in priority habitat areas. It is particularly significant that it is taking place in the Burren where priority habitats feature so prominently. The priority habitats which are the focus of this Project include:



Burren Limestone Pavement



Burnet Rose

**Limestone pavement** - a glacio-karstic feature of limited distribution in Europe. In Ireland it is largely confined to the Burren region. Of the national total, it is estimated that 60% (or 18,000ha) is included in the Project area. These are very high quality limestone pavement habitats, largely intact, with a wide array of interesting karst and karren features.

**Species-rich limestone grasslands** are closely associated with the Burren in the Irish context, and the grasslands present represent c. 26% of the national cover of 6,000ha of this habitat. The grasslands within the Project area are of very high quality containing a diversity and richness of species such as blue moor grass, bird's-foot trefoil, spring gentian and bloody cranesbill among others. Orchid species include the frog orchid, bee orchid, fly orchid, and spotted orchids to name but a few.



Species rich limestone grasslands



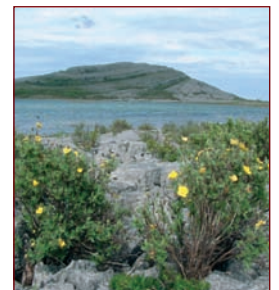
Common Spotted Orchid

**A range of wetlands** including turloughs (275 ha, c.9% of the national total), petrifying springs with tufa formations (a good proportion of the estimated national cover of 0.5 ha) and Cladium fens (200 ha, c.8% of the national total for this habitat) are found in the Project target area.

The scale, diversity and quality of these priority habitats in the Burren are internationally significant. However, they are threatened by a number of factors, largely related to recent changes in land management practices resulting in an imbalance in the traditional relationship between farming and the local Burren environment.



Carron Turlough



Shrubby Cinquefoil

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## A 'Blueprint Model' for Partnerships

An opportunity for sustainable development for people and nature was the message from Mr. Micheal Ó Briain – European Commission, Directorate-General Environment, Nature and Biodiversity on his visit to the Project during the early summer of 2005. Mr Ó Briain stated that he viewed the BurrenLIFE Project as a blueprint for ensuring living rural communities in priority habitats and he noted that the Project was already a powerful tool in terms of the ongoing policy debate on the future of the Burren. He stressed that the EU would play its role in helping to find practical solutions to the management of this internationally important habitat. Mr Ó Briain noted that the 'Partnership Model' developed between the NPWS, Teagasc and the IFA was one of the best models of partnership that he had witnessed. It was an example to others to follow. The farming community of the Burren were leading the way in terms of conservation farming in Ireland. The Burren IFA, in giving such leadership and in entering into the BurrenLIFE Project as equal partners, was investing in the future of the farming community of the Burren.



Mr. Micheal Ó Briain – European Commission (to front) and Mr. Michael McGrath



# the view of the partners

## The Project Sponsor National Parks and Wildlife Service

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, is responsible for National and European site (Natura 2000) designation for species and habitat protection. The NPWS have developed management plans for candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC) and give advice to landowners on land management practices deemed favourable to nature conservation within designated sites and in the general countryside. The NPWS implement the Wildlife Act and Habitats Directive in Ireland and is responsible for the Burren National Park, Slieve Carran Nature Reserve, and nature conservation in the wider Burren, c.47,000 hectares of which is designated as cSAC. The NPWS are the competent legal authority for nature conservation works in the Burren.

## Partner 1: Teagasc Agricultural and Food Development Authority

Teagasc provides an integrated research, advisory and training service to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities. Teagasc employs research scientists, local farm advisors, regional specialists, teachers, administration and support staff. Teagasc is also responsible for the implementation of the Opportunities Programme, which provides training and access to employment opportunities. Teagasc promote farm development and implement EU agricultural schemes including Common Agricultural Policy and European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF/FEOGA). Teagasc is responsible for research and training of landowners in the Burren area and is currently supporting two research posts in the Burren, along with three farm advisers and specialists.

## Partner 2: Burren Irish Farmers Association

The Burren IFA is the main representative body for the farmers of the Burren. The Burren IFA group was established in 1995 as a local branch of the National organisation in order to represent the unique interests of Burren farmers at a National level. The executive committee of this organisation has farmer representatives from all areas of the Burren. This group was involved in the negotiation of the Burren REPS Agreement in 1995, and continues to play a leading role in the development of agriculture in the region.



Mr Tom Shanahan (Teagasc), Mr Michael Davoren (IFA) and Dr John Wilson (NPWS)

## NPWS

Dr. John Cross, of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Project Beneficiary / Project Sponsor) stressed that 'past attempts to protect areas without involving the farming community were largely unsuccessful'. Ireland has signed up to various conservation measures under the EU Habitats Directives and there are serious obligations on the Irish government to ensure that these are adhered to. Dr Cross emphasised that 'delivery can only take place through the active support of the farming community. The NPWS places great value on the partnership being developed with the farming community in the Burren. The NPWS views the BurrenLIFE Project as a potential blueprint for nature conservation throughout Ireland where farming is the essential component of land use'.

## Teagasc

Teagasc's Chief Agricultural Officer in Clare, Mr Tom Shanahan, stated that 'Teagasc had been hugely supportive of the work of the BurrenLIFE Project'. He highlighted the importance of the partnership model to deliver the objectives of the Project. 'Teagasc were proud to be part of this unique project which sees three partners working together for a common goal. Teagasc would continue to play a key role in supporting the research side of the Project – research which was being undertaken not in a laboratory but in a living environment supporting a living community'. Mr Shanahan stressed that 'farmers were the key to this partnership' and he called on all Burren farmers to support the Project Team.

## Burren IFA

The Chairperson of the Burren IFA, Mr Michael Davoren in fully embracing the Project stated that he views the Project 'as an investment in the future of the farming community of the Burren' and 'an opportunity to ensure that farmers become the architects of their own destiny'. He noted the fact that it is vital that the Project be a success and that there was 100% commitment from the Burren IFA to the Project. Farmers recognise the importance of the Project 'as a tool for future lobbying at policy level' to ensure that 'Burren farmers get the recognition they deserve as custodians of this vitally important landscape'. Mr Davoren stressed that 'farmers are now producing a different type of commodity – a rare and valuable commodity based on farming for conservation'. This would see 'farmers both protecting and conserving the Burren environment not just for their own families, but for future generations of Irish people'.

# progress achieved so far

## The Project Team

After a lengthy and competitive recruitment process the entire Project Team was in place by mid March 2005. The calibre and skill base of the Project Team is of the highest quality with over 40 years of direct relevant work experience between the three Project Staff. In addition, the secondment of Dr James Moran to the Project from Teagasc as an Ecology/Conservation Specialist, and a leading Turlough specialist (one of the Priority Habitats covered by the Project) has added great strength to the Project Team.

### Dr. Brendan Dunford - Project Manager

From a farming background in Co. Waterford, Brendan has spent the past 8 years in the Burren region. In 2001 he completed his doctorate on the impact of farming on the heritage of the Burren, later published by Teagasc as 'Farming and the Burren'. He is co-founder of the not-for-profit Burrenbeo project.

### Dr. Sharon Parr - Scientific Co-ordinator

Sharon is a biologist who spent two years creating a map of the broad habitats of the Burren using satellite imagery and extensive field walking. This work placed particular emphasis on mapping grasslands and scrub. Previously, she spent 15 years in UCD working as a large animal parasitologist where she specialised in red water, liver fluke, the control of worms in cattle, sheep and horses and drug-resistance in parasites.

### Mr. Ruairí Ó Conchúir - Finance and Operations Administrator

Originally from Dublin, Ruairí has worked in rural development in West Clare since 2001. Prior to this he worked in Southern Africa for 10 years with local and international NGOs and the South African government on land reform, LandCare, rural development and community based eco-tourism projects. Ruairí holds an M. Sc (Agric) from UCD.

### Dr. James Moran - Ecology/Conservation expert for the Burren working with Teagasc

James is from a farming background in Co. Mayo. He worked as a REPS planner from 1997 to 1999 in Clare and Galway, after graduating from NUI, Galway. Between 2000 and 2005 he worked part time as a REPS planner and ecologist while completing his doctorate on the influence of grazing and flooding regimes on the biodiversity of turloughs. He is currently employed in the environment advisory section of Teagasc.

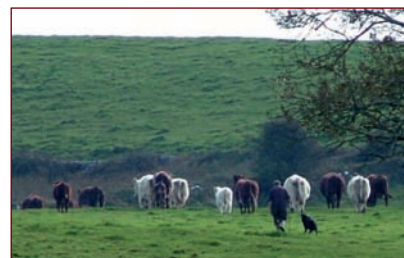
Since its establishment good progress has been made in getting the Project up and running. Significant achievements include the recruitment of the Project Team and the establishment of a fully functional Project office. Considerable time and effort has also gone into building a strong relationship with the farming community in the Burren, the selection of monitor farms or 'LIFE Farms', and the collection of baseline habitat data from these farms. The significance of the Project for the future of the Burren, and for their own future opportunities, has been actively conveyed to the farming community. It is clear that the farming community want to be active players within the Project over the next number of years.

## Initial 'LIFE Farms' Selected

Farm liaison and site selection activities over the summer months resulted in the selection of the initial batch of 12 'LIFE Farms'. Detailed farm management plans and agreements have been drawn up for these farms. Work will commence this winter with these farmers on restoration work of damaged areas, improving livestock management facilities, targeted scrub removal and most importantly the implementation of new grazing regimes through stock redeployment within the mapped managements units / habitats types on the farm. Detailed user friendly folders containing all the information generated by the farmers through working with the Project Team have been developed for each farm. These will be living documents which will act as the base reference for all future work. All information generated will be kept on file not only by the Project but also the owner of the LIFE Farm.

## Cattle Back on Burren Winterage

Since early October 2005 many Burren farmers have had their livestock back on the winterages. Related to this the Project has continued forage sampling work of winterage grasslands. The sampling strategy has been spatially extended to cover a wider variety of habitats on 'LIFE Farms' and other site locations. These will, in due course, help the Project have a better understanding of the agricultural capacity of Burren grasslands. The Project, with the assistance of Teagasc, continues the work to formulate appropriate supplementary feedstuff rations. As a result of this work it is hoped that that purchase and distribution of concentrate feedstuff to the initial batch of 'LIFE Farms' will begin in January 2006.



Driving cattle up onto the winterage from Burren grasslands, early October 2005

## Monitoring Work On LIFE Farms

A major part of the Project's work is to monitor the impacts that the changes to the current management practices of the 'LIFE Farms' have on the farm enterprise and the environment. Agricultural surveys based on Teagasc's National Farm Survey model, are being used to assess impacts on farm income. Particular attention will be paid to the health and welfare of the livestock by condition scoring animals when going onto, when on, and when coming off the winterages. Checks will also be made on the effect of using specially formulated supplementary feedstuffs rather than silage. Where changes have been made to try to redress low grazing levels or scrub encroachment, detailed vegetation studies are being carried out to detect any changes in the quality of the flora.

# News and Events

## Official Project Launch

The official Project launch, performed by the Minister of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr. Dick Roche TD, in July 2005, was a tremendous occasion for the Project. Over 180 people attended from far and wide including large numbers of local farmers. The launch featured widely in the media with coverage by national radio and TV and by the local media (radio and news print). The event was also marked by some significant journals including Teagasc's 'Today's Farm, Bird Watch Ireland's magazine 'Wings' and the EMI magazine. The success of the launch helped improve levels of national and international recognition for the Burren and the work of the Project. It also helped build an even stronger working relationship between the key role-players in the Project.



Dr Alan Craig (NPWS), Mr. Michael Davoren (Burren IFA), Minister Dick Roche TD, Dr Brendan Dunford, Mr Tom Shanahan (Teagasc), Dr James Moran (Teagasc) and Dr Sharon Parr and Mr. Ruairi Ó Conchúir

## Advisory Groups Established

A Project Steering Committee (PSC) was established in January 2005 and is now functioning effectively. It is comprised of the principal role-players involved in the implementation of the work programme of the Project (two members each from NPWS, Teagasc and IFA). It is designed to ensure that a platform exists at a local level in order that all partners can work in a spirit of co-operation in supporting the delivery of the Project Actions. The Project Team acts as secretariat to the PSC and the Project Manager acts as Chairperson. The PSC has met on seven occasions in 2005 since it was established. The frequency of PSC meetings has been instrumental in ensuring the smooth roll-out of work of the Project.

A wider Project Advisory Group (PAG) has also been established. This acts as the wider regional reference point for the Project. It is comprised of the parties who sit on the PSC and other Project supporters including Clare and Galway County Council, the Department of Agriculture and Food, the Heritage Council, RRD Leader (Clare Leader Group) and the National University of Ireland, Galway. The PAG is designed to ensure that a regional / national platform exists to ensure that all parties involved in the management of the Burren have an opportunity to work in a spirit of co-operation in supporting the delivery of the Project Actions. The PAG has held two meetings in 2005 and will meet twice yearly.



Members of the BurrenLife - Project Advisory Group (PAG)

In addition to the above, and given the enhanced role of Teagasc, through the appointment of Dr James Moran to the Project, a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) has been established within Teagasc. This TAG is internal to Teagasc and is comprised of both research and advisory staff with a broad range of expertise. The TAG provides technical support and advice in relation to the research and advisory work undertaken by Teagasc as a Partner in the Project. The TAG has held two meetings in 2005 and will meet twice yearly at the beginning and end of the project year (September and March respectively). The specialists on the TAG are available to the Project for consultation as their expertise is required.

## Launch of the Project Website: [www.burrenlife.com](http://www.burrenlife.com)

In order to assist in communication and in disseminating the work of the Project to a wider audience a high quality, fully accessible (European W3 / Priority 1 & 2) interactive website has been developed. The design of this was undertaken by Copper Reed Studios and will officially go live in November 2005. Please register your details with the Project via our website.

## Heritage / Environmental Education Programme

The Project Team has been extremely active on the educational front since the establishment of the Project. Work has been undertaken with local national schools in the Burren area (Carran, Ballyvaughan, and Kinvara) and in-service training workshops have also been delivered to national school teachers. In addition to farmers information nights, important briefings have been held with Teagasc and NPWS staff in Clare and Galway and for the Department of Agriculture in Limerick. In October 2005, the Project awarded the tender for its Heritage Education Programme which will run for the next 4 years. This will focus on 12 national and 3 secondary schools in the Burren together with public events. Anyone wishing to get additional information on this work, which will commence in January 2006, should contact the Project Team.

## Making News and Making Links

From the outset, the BurrenLIFE Project has had excellent media coverage. There has been widespread media interest in the imaginative nature of the work outlined in the Project Actions. Media interest has included two TV feature pieces on RTE, one of which was a primetime news feature on the Project launch in July 2005. Other high profile media exposure included a major feature and editorial comment in the Irish Farmers Journal as well as major features in local newspapers (The Clare Champion, The Clare People). International attention was drawn to the Project at the European Vegetation Conference, which was hosted by the NPWS and held in Galway. Two Project Team members presented papers at the event and the Project Team hosted the delegates during a field trip to the Burren where the work of the Project was outlined in situ. The Project was also presented at the annual NPWS conference in October and the Teagasc REPS Conference in November 2005. The full Project Team also visited the LIFE funded Limestone Country Project in the Yorkshire Dales, UK during May and learnt valuable lessons.



Dr. Brendan Dunford

# Progress Towards Planned Activities

The Project is implementing an ambitious work programme for the next number of years. The main areas of progress against targets set for the past 12 months include:

Action No.	Project Achievements in 2005	Date Achieved
A.1	Compilation of Burren Land Use database Ongoing since June 2005	June 2005
A.2	Site Selection and Farmer Liaison Public meetings, 60 farm visits, briefings, etc - ongoing since March	March 2005
A.3	Baseline Survey of 2000ha of Project Sites Complete on approx. 1, 300 hectares - August 2005 and ongoing	August 2005
A.4	Farm Management Plans and Agreements (Contracts) Complete on 12 LIFE farms - work ongoing	November 2005
E.2	Project Website - <a href="http://www.burrenlife.com">www.burrenlife.com</a>	November 2005
E.4	Educational Programme Educational work by Project members ongoing since April 2005 Heritage Education Programme Tender awarded in October 2005	April 2005
E.7	Project Reporting - 1st Year Progress Report delivered to the EC	September 2005
F.1	Establishment and operation of Advisory Groups Project Steering Committee established - January 2005 Project Advisory Group established - July 2005 Technical Advisory Group (Teagasc) established - April 2005	January 2005
F.2	Official Project Launch by Minister Dick Roche TD	July 2005
F.3	Employment of Project Team - full team in place March 2005	March 2005

## Work Activities in 2006

The Project's work focus over the next number of months will be on the selected 'LIFE Farms'. Work will commence this winter with the initial 12 'LIFE Farms' on restoration work of damaged areas, on enhancing livestock management facilities, on targeted scrub removal and on the implementation of new grazing regimes through stock redeployment. Farmer liaison and site selection activities will also continue and new farm management plans and agreements will be completed on the remaining 'LIFE Farms' to be selected in 2006.

## Your Input Is Important

Every single farmer and member of the wider farming community in the Burren has something to contribute to the BurrenLIFE Project. This may be something as simple as sharing your ideas, knowledge or experience with the Project Team. In other cases it may mean becoming one of the selected 'LIFE Farms', or even a demonstration farm. All involvement will be on a voluntary basis. Involvement will cost you nothing but your time.

However, the Project Team hope that it will benefit you, your family and your heritage for years to come. So get involved now, and help secure a brighter future for the Burren and its farmers! If you want further information on the BurrenLIFE Project please visit [www.burrenlife.com](http://www.burrenlife.com)

## Contact Us.....

Get in touch with the Project in any of the following ways:

Write or Call into the Project Office:

Mr. Ruairí Ó Conchúir, BurrenLIFE, c/o Teagasc Office,  
Ardnaculla, Ennistymon, Co. Clare.

The Project will be moving to a new office in Carron,  
Co Clare in early 2006.

Telephone: 065 707 2586 • E-mail: [info@burrenlife.com](mailto:info@burrenlife.com)

If you wish to be placed on our mailing list for regular Project Updates, Newsletters and Reports, please send us your details or register online on our website: [www.burrenlife.com](http://www.burrenlife.com)

Getting  
In Touch  
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Us  
Is Easy!

