

National Parks and Wildlife Service

Conservation Objectives Series

Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA 004161



An Roinn Tithíochta,
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Introduction

The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them. These two designations are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network.

European and national legislation places a collective obligation on Ireland and its citizens to maintain habitats and species in the Natura 2000 network at favourable conservation condition. The Government and its agencies are responsible for the implementation and enforcement of regulations that will ensure the ecological integrity of these sites.

A site-specific conservation objective aims to define favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at that site.

The maintenance of habitats and species within Natura 2000 sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing, and
- the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Notes/Guidelines:

1. The targets given in these conservation objectives are based on best available information at the time of writing. As more information becomes available, targets for attributes may change. These will be updated periodically, as necessary.
2. An appropriate assessment based on these conservation objectives will remain valid even if the targets are subsequently updated, providing they were the most recent objectives available when the assessment was carried out. It is essential that the date and version are included when objectives are cited.
3. Assessments cannot consider an attribute in isolation from the others listed for that habitat or species, or for other habitats and species listed for that site. A plan or project with an apparently small impact on one attribute may have a significant impact on another.
4. Please note that the maps included in this document do not necessarily show the entire extent of the habitats and species for which the site is listed. This should be borne in mind when appropriate assessments are being carried out.
5. When using these objectives, it is essential that the relevant backing/supporting documents are consulted, particularly where instructed in the targets or notes for a particular attribute.

Qualifying Interests

** indicates a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive*

004161	Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA
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A082	Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>
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Please note that this SPA overlaps with Lower River Shannon SAC (002165) and Blackwater River (Cork/Waterford) SAC (002170). See map 2. The conservation objectives for this site should be used in conjunction with those for the overlapping sites as appropriate.

Supporting documents, relevant reports & publications

Supporting documents, NPWS reports and publications are available for download from: www.npws.ie/Publications

NPWS Documents

Year :	2015
Title :	Hen harrier special protection area (SPA) habitat mapping project 2014
Author :	Moran, P.; Wilson-Parr, R.
Series :	Irish Wildlife Manual No. 83
Year :	2015
Title :	Hen harrier conservation and the forestry sector in Ireland - forestry - V3.2
Author :	NPWS
Series :	Unpublished Report
Year :	2016
Title :	The 2015 national survey of breeding hen harrier in Ireland
Author :	Ruddock, M.; Mee, A.; Lusby, J.; Nagle, A.; O'Neill, S.; O'Toole, L.
Series :	Irish Wildlife Manual No. 93
Year :	2022
Title :	Conservation objectives supporting document: breeding hen harrier
Author :	NPWS
Series :	Conservation objectives supporting document

Other References

Year :	2002
Title :	A national survey of breeding hen harriers (<i>circus cyaneus</i>) in Ireland 1998-2000
Author :	Norriss, D.W., Marsh, J., McMahon, D. & Oliver, G.A.
Series :	Irish Birds, 7, 1-10
Year :	2006
Title :	The second national survey of breeding hen harriers <i>circus cyaneus</i> in Ireland
Author :	Barton, C., Pollock, C., Norriss, D.W., Nagle, T., Oliver, G.A. & Newton, S.
Series :	Irish Birds, 8, 1-20
Year :	2006
Title :	The distribution of hen harriers in Ireland in relation to land use cover, particularly forest cover
Author :	Wilson, M.; Gittings, T.; O'Halloran, J.; Kelly, T.; Pithon, J.
Series :	Environment No. 6. COFORD, Dublin
Year :	2012
Title :	Optimum scenarios for hen harrier conservation in Ireland; final report 2012
Author :	Irwin, S.; Wilson, W.; O'Donoghue, B.; O'Mahony, B.; Kelly, T.; O'Halloran, J.
Series :	Prepared for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine by the School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University College Cork
Year :	2014
Title :	Ranging behaviour of hen harriers breeding in special protection areas in Scotland
Author :	Arroyo, B.; Leckie, F.; Amar, A.; Cluskie, A; Redpath, S.
Series :	Bird Study, 61:1, 48-55

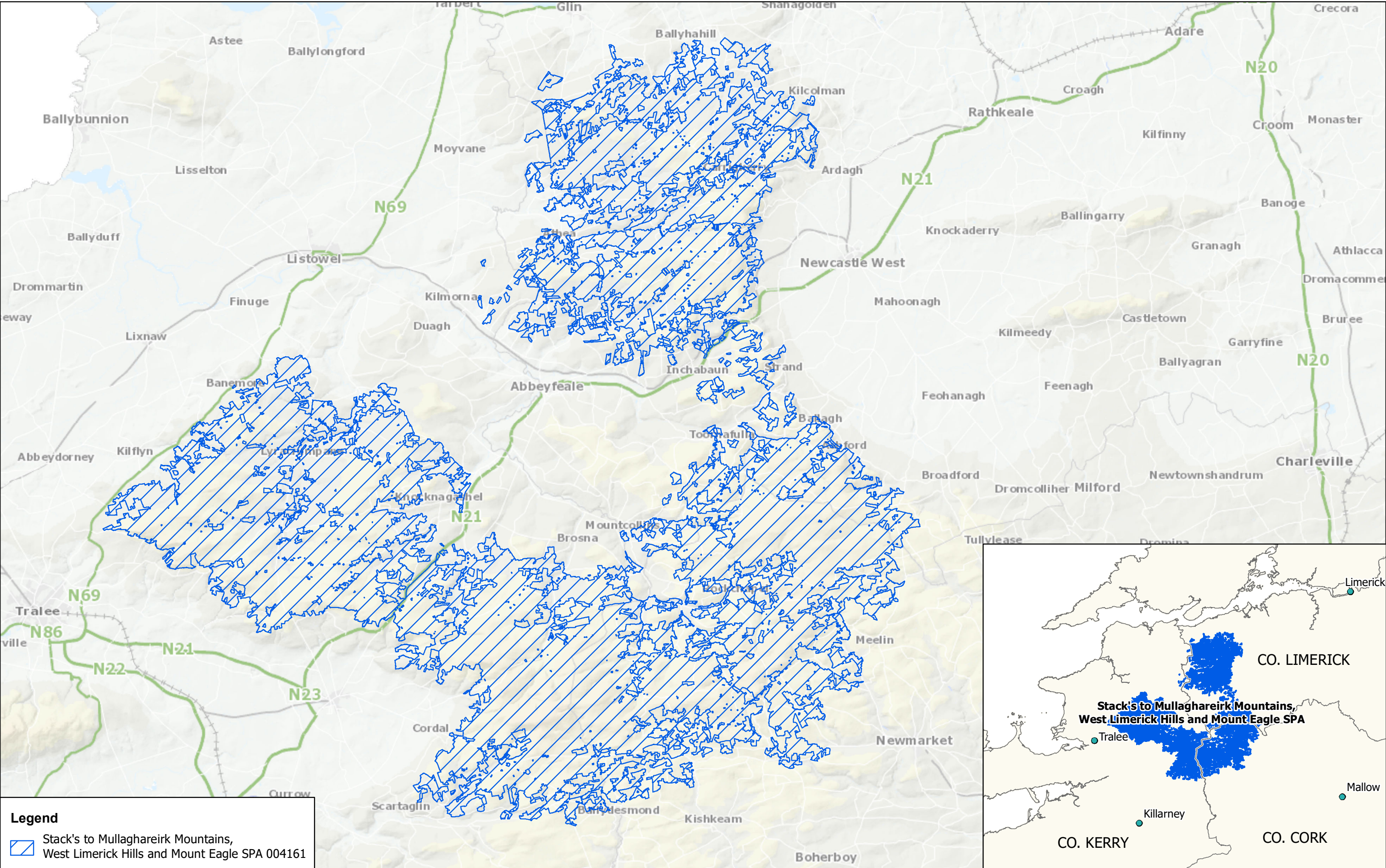
Conservation Objectives for : Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA [004161]

A082 Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

To restore the favourable conservation condition of hen harrier in Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Population size	Number of confirmed breeding pairs	Restore the numbers of confirmed breeding pairs to at least 38–39 confirmed breeding pairs	The attribute 'confirmed breeding pairs' is based on standard survey methods (see Ruddock et al., 2016). The target for this SPA is informed by the first two national surveys of 1998–2001 (Norris et al., 2002) and 2005 (Barton et al., 2006). For further information on this and all other attributes, please refer to the conservation objectives supporting document for breeding hen harrier (NPWS, 2022) for further details
Productivity rate	Number of fledged young per confirmed pair	Maintain at least 1.0–1.4 fledged young per confirmed pair	At the SPA level, the productivity rate can be highly variable in any given year. Generally, the setting of a minimum level of productivity to ensure a stable and/or increasing population at a given site ought to be informed by robust estimates of: post-fledging survival; adult survival; and immigration and emigration rates. Setting a single precise and robust rate is constrained by a lack of comprehensive Irish data. In order to frame this uncertainty, a threshold of 1.0–1.4 fledged young per confirmed breeding pair is set for this attribute. If population size of the SPA is not favourable, then the upper end of this productivity rate range is to be met. In order for estimates to be sufficiently representative of the SPA, they need to be of sufficient sample size and ideally over multiple years in order to account for inter-annual variability
Spatial utilisation by breeding pairs	Percentage	Restore the spatial utilisation of the SPA by breeding pairs to at least 97–98 %	Optimal resilience depends on breeding pairs utilising the SPA to the maximum extent possible. The spatial distribution of breeding pairs is expressed by the proportion of the SPA being used by them. Breeding pairs predominantly use the area within 5km of their nest site or centre of territory, though they can travel further (e.g. Irwin et al., 2012; Arroyo et al., 2014). Thus, the core area used by confirmed pairs can be broadly and generically estimated by calculating the portion that lies within 5km of all recorded nest sites. Ideally, the breeding population should be well dispersed around the SPA. The target range for this attribute for this SPA is informed by the first two national surveys of 1998–2001 and 2005
Extent and condition of heath and bog and associated habitats	Hectares; condition assessment	Restore the extent and quality of this resource to support the targets relating to population size, productivity rate and spatial utilisation	Open heath and bog occur in mosaics and often with other semi-natural habitats (e.g. scrub). These habitats can provide important nesting and foraging resources for the breeding population providing they are in suitable condition. Based on the habitat mapping of Moran and Wilson-Parr (2015), the estimated total extent of these habitats in this SPA is 10,366ha. Qualitative aspects were not assessed by Moran and Wilson-Parr (2015), but some important aspects to consider are the habitats' structure, soil integrity and overall open habitat coherence

Extent and condition of low intensity managed grasslands and associated habitats	Hectares; condition assessment	Restore the extent and quality of this resource to support the targets relating to population size, productivity rate and spatial utilisation	Low intensity managed grasslands occur in mosaics and often with other semi-natural habitats (e.g. scrub). These habitats can provide important foraging resources for the breeding population providing they are in suitable condition. Based on the habitat mapping of Moran and Wilson-Parr (2015), the estimated total extent of these habitats in this SPA is 9,783ha. Qualitative aspects were not assessed by Moran and Wilson-Parr (2015), but some important aspects to consider are the habitats' structure and overall open habitat coherence
Extent and condition of hedgerows	Kilometres; condition assessment	Maintain at least the length and quality of this resource to support the targets relating to population size, productivity rate and spatial utilisation	Hedgerows can be an important foraging resource for hen harrier throughout the year by providing food and refuge for prey animals i.e. small mammals and birds. Moran and Wilson-Parr (2015) quantified the hedgerow resource in this SPA with an estimated total linear extent of 2,599.7km, with two structural hedgerow types namely 'intact and dense' and 'boxed and moderate' accounting for 425.7km of that total. These combined types account for 13% of the total hedgerow resource of the SPA
Age structure of forest estate	Percentage	Achieve an even and consistent distribution of age-classes across the forest estate	This attribute aims to define optimal forest age-class composition required to reduce the forest demographic bottleneck, as set out in NPWS (2015) and Wilson et al. (2006)
Disturbance to breeding sites	Level of impact	Disturbance occurs at levels that does not significantly impact upon breeding hen harrier	The impact of any significant disturbance on the SPA's breeding population will ultimately be manifested in the targets which relate to population demographics (i.e. population size, productivity rate) and the spatial utilisation of the SPA by breeding pairs. Factors such as intensity, frequency, timing and duration of a potentially disturbing activity need to be taken into account to determine its significance on breeding hen harrier in the SPA



Legend

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