



**NPWS**

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna  
Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra  
National Parks and Wildlife Service

## **2024 in Review**

# National Parks and Wildlife Service



Prepared by the National Parks & Wildlife Service  
**NPWS.ie**





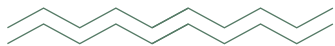


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# Foreword from Minister James Browne



It gives me great pleasure together with my colleague at the Department, Minister of State Christopher O'Sullivan, to publish this National Parks and Wildlife Service Review 2024.



**IT IS A PRIVILEGE** to lead the Department responsible for the stewardship of our natural heritage.

As part of the heritage division within the Department, NPWS plays a key role in protecting Ireland's natural heritage. That role is becoming increasingly important, but also complex, as we seek to address the climate and biodiversity crisis and deliver on our national and international commitments in this area.

The capacity, diverse skills and leadership that the NPWS needs to protect and restore nature must be supported. This is clearly recognised within a new Programme for Government, and through record levels of investment in our natural heritage, including €78 million in core funding to the NPWS in 2025.

NPWS has grown as an Executive Agency in its own right within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage since the Strategic Action Plan for Renewal was published in 2022. New structures are in place to strengthen the NPWS so that it can act as a trusted voice for nature.

The NPWS should be proud of its many achievements last year, including the acquisition of land for nature, expanding the number of National



Our natural heritage in Ireland is something that touches our daily lives, our health and wellbeing and our environment but it is also fundamental to our future

Parks and Nature Reserves, rolling out conservation projects, as well as a range of schemes which support and incentivise communities, landowners and farmers.

I'd like to acknowledge the huge contribution of the NPWS staff around the country and thank them for their commitment and dedication in working to protect Ireland's natural heritage. Our staff constitute an exceptional resource in the service of the State and as custodians of our precious national resources, and they are central to our continued achievements within the Department.

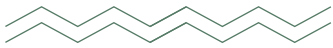
Our natural heritage in Ireland is something that touches our daily lives, our health and wellbeing and our environment but it is also fundamental to our future. It is incumbent upon us to pass it on to the next generation unharmed.

I look forward to working with Minister of State O'Sullivan over the coming years, to ensure that NPWS is equipped to protect our natural heritage for future generations.

Dúchas is Dóchas. Is fúinne atá sé iad a fhorbairt agus a chosaint.

**James Browne TD**  
Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage

# Foreword from Minister of State Christopher O'Sullivan



I'm delighted to present this NPWS Review 2024 along with my colleague Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage James Browne TD.



**OUR NATIONAL PARKS** and Nature Reserves are vital ecosystems that combat climate change and provide spaces for recreation, mental well-being, and the enjoyment of Ireland's wild landscapes. I am excited to take on this important role as Minister for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity – it couldn't be at a more important time.

Since taking up office earlier this year I've had some opportunities to engage with the work of the Agency, and this Review really resonates with my experience so far. Our response to the biodiversity crisis is at a tipping point. We are making gains through acquiring land for nature, public support and proactive conservation measures, but at the same time our most valuable assets are at risk from the impact of illegal fire activity, invasive species, climate change and wildlife crime.

Progress has been made, fuelled by renewed leadership and change within the NPWS. There is much to be learned from the account presented here. We must collaborate with communities, landowners, farmers, along with other agencies. Science can give us the tools but they must be applied using local knowledge. Public awareness, community engagement and action are key. All of this must be supported by sustained investment and strong political leadership.

This Government remains deeply committed to protecting and restoring our natural heritage. This is not only the right thing to do but also reflects Ireland's responsibilities under EU legislation and Directives, including the Nature Restoration Law which came into force last year. We will continue to invest in National Parks and Nature Reserves,

support the exceptional work of the NPWS, and deliver a Nature Restoration Plan that is inclusive and which positions Ireland as a leader in conservation and biodiversity restoration.

I would like to pay tribute to NPWS staff across directorates and regions, as well as the landowners, farmers and communities for their efforts to protect and enhance our biodiversity.

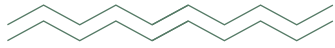
Ensuring that the NPWS has the resources it needs to thrive is essential to safeguarding these spaces for the species which depend on them for survival, along with the millions of visitors who enjoy Ireland's National Parks each year. I look forward to working closely with the NPWS, under the leadership of Director General Niall Ó Donnchú, along with other partners and stakeholders. Ireland's natural heritage is a gift, and we have a shared responsibility to protect it and an opportunity to act.



Public awareness, community engagement and action are key. All of this must be supported by sustained investment and strong political leadership

**Christopher O'Sullivan**  
Minister of State for Nature,  
Heritage and Biodiversity

# Introduction from our Director General



It is an honour for me to present this Year in Review on behalf of the National Parks and Wildlife Service for 2024; a year during which we continued to grow and thrive as an organisation.



**THIS YEAR HAS SEEN** many challenges and opportunities, and I am proud to report that the goals set out in our **Strategic Action Plan 2022-2024** have been largely achieved.

Throughout the year, we focused on executing the plan, delivering on our mission to protect nature and making real progress in restoring habitats and bolstering species.

We continued to make progress in growing staffing levels in the NPWS – nationwide and across all roles. Our people are our greatest asset, and increasing our investment in staffing remains essential.

Action for biodiversity in Ireland has grown considerably in recent years,

with a strong emphasis on collaboration with landowners and local communities, enabling a collective response to the biodiversity crisis. A wide range of initiatives, projects and funding streams managed by the NPWS are now delivering positive change for nature.

In a year with many significant achievements, some highlights include our investments in strategic high nature value land acquisitions, including the establishment of Ireland's first marine National Park, Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara, Ciarraí; implementation of conservation measures on over 90 Natura 2000 sites; publication of **Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023-2030**; enhanced collaboration with other enforcement agencies such as An Garda Síochána, yielding a series

of successful prosecutions taken by NPWS; winning of three prestigious awards – 2024 Natura 2000 Award in the category 'Working together for nature', International Dark Sky Place of the year at Wild Nephin National Park and a Public Sector Digital Transformation Award for our transformative work on elicensing. These awards stand testimony to our amazing colleagues across the country; making a very clear statement about their professionalism and capacity to deliver for nature, working in and with their communities.

And we now present 8 National Parks and 77 Nature Reserves to the visiting public!

A key factor in our success this year has been the Government's continued prioritisation of nature, reflected in the sustained increase in core funding – from €28.7 million in 2020 to €69.1 million in 2024. When combined with the EU LIFE Programme and other biodiversity-related funding, this brings our effective budget for 2024 to approximately €120 million. NPWS has also increased its staffing from 349 in 2020 to 558 in December 2024.

I would like to acknowledge and thank our Ministers – the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage and



Action for biodiversity in Ireland has grown considerably in recent years, with a strong emphasis on collaboration with landowners and local communities, enabling a collective response to the biodiversity crisis



the Minister for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity, our parent Department, the public stakeholders, including Government Departments, State Agencies, and members of the public for their continued support for the work we do. The role of non-governmental stakeholders is also key in sharpening the focus on delivery of our nature goals.


The ongoing success and growth of the NPWS would not be possible without the exceptional dedication and commitment of our Management Committee and colleagues across the country. While this work is deeply rewarding, it is also challenging and I want to express my sincere gratitude for their steadfast commitment, diligence, and invaluable contributions, all of which have played a crucial role in our efforts to protect nature.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank those staff who retired in the past year, many of whom dedicated 40 or more years of service to nature and the NPWS.

As Director General of the NPWS, I am confident that, as we move into 2025, we are in a stronger position, continuing to advance the ambitious goals outlined in our **Strategic Plan 2023-2025**, delivering greater impact and achieving better outcomes for nature for this generation and the next.



**Niall Ó Donnchú**  
Director General



The ongoing success and growth of the NPWS would not be possible without the exceptional dedication and commitment of our Management Committee and colleagues across the country



## Our Mission

The mission of the NPWS is to

# PROTECT NATURE



# Our Values



A deep love of nature, and a commitment to its care and safeguarding.

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Partnership, teamwork and excellence, and a well-grounded pride in our professionalism and scientific integrity.

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A strong identity and a trusted voice for nature.

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Transparency and accountability in our decision-making.

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Excellence in the service we deliver to the public.

# About National Parks & Wildlife Service



The NPWS is an Executive Agency within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, with primary responsibility for nature conservation, wildlife protection and the presentation and preservation of our National Parks and Nature Reserves.

## The NPWS has a diverse range of responsibilities:

- Significant policy advisory and policy-making functions in relation to nature and biodiversity;
- A wide range of operational responsibilities including the management of 8 National Parks, 77 Nature Reserves, and a variety of other State lands accessible to the public;
- Management of a range of EU programmes, alongside thousands of conservation measures across the Natura Network and National Parks;
- A broad scientific remit, including the monitoring of habitats, species and designated sites, and undertaking scientific research;
- Principal coordinator of the National Biodiversity Action Plan;
- Statutory consultee in relation to planning matters, including county and regional development plans, forestry and agricultural development;
- Regulatory and licencing functions;
- Administering grant schemes to support farm-plans, conservation measures, actions for biodiversity, as well as invasive species control measures;
- Prevention, investigation and enforcement of wildlife crime.







## National Parks

- 1 Glenveagh National Park lies in the heart of County Donegal. It includes Glenveagh Castle and Gardens along Lough Veagh.
- 2 Wild Nephin National Park is on the Western seaboard in northwest Mayo and is home to the Owenduff Bog, one of the last intact blanket bog systems in Western Europe.
- 3 Connemara National Park includes part of the Twelve Bens mountain range, and lands that once formed part of the Kylemore Abbey Estate and Letterfrack Industrial School.
- 4 The Burren National Park is in the southeastern corner of the Burren in County Clare and is internationally famous for its landscape of limestone pavement and unique flora.
- 5 Killarney National Park is in the southwest of Kerry. The Park includes mountains, lakes, woodlands and waterfalls, and incorporates Muckross Estate.
- 6 Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara, Ciarraí, is Ireland's first Marine National Park. It brings together marine reefs, mainland coastal and maritime sites on and off the Kerry coast.
- 7 Brú na Bóinne National Park includes lands recently acquired by NPWS which amount to one third of the total area of the UNESCO World Heritage Property of Brú na Bóinne.
- 8 Wicklow Mountains National Park features mountain roads, deep lakes and wooded valleys, including St Kevin's monastic settlement at Glendalough.



**8** National  
Parks



**77** Nature  
Reserves





## NPWS Core Areas of Focus

- 1 Support nature-related decision-making and investment** at all levels of Irish society through enhanced and user-friendly guidance, sharing of best practice, advice, support and enforcement.
- 2 Foster community and societal engagement** with nature and biodiversity, through effective communication, engagement and volunteerism.
- 3 Enhance NPWS leadership, workforce excellence and build capacity.**
- 4 Expand and develop NPWS infrastructure and facilities.**
- 5 Deliver organisational transformation** as set out in the NPWS Strategic Action Plan 2022-2024.



## Organisational Structure

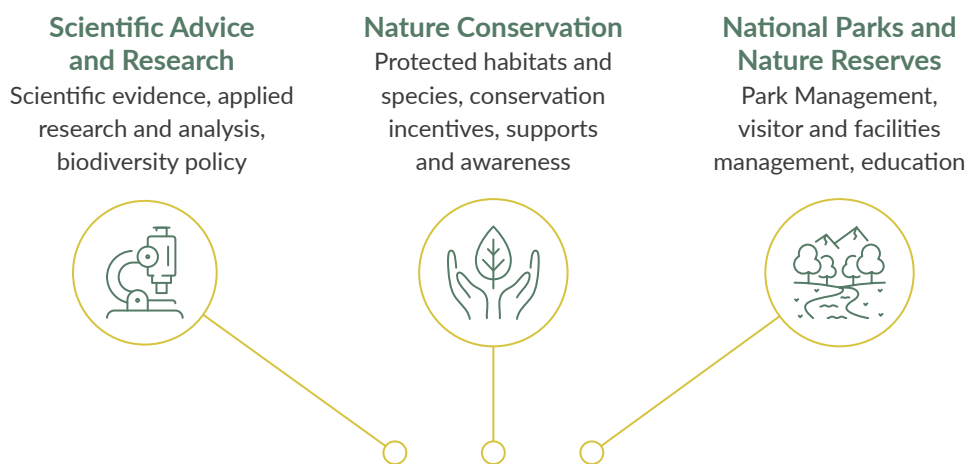
In 2024, the NPWS operated under a strengthened executive management structure introduced the previous year to support continued organisational growth and transformation.

This structure, shaped in part by recommendations from an independent

review, was further refined through internal assessment, leading to the establishment of seven functional Directorates. Each Directorate focuses on a core area of responsibility, enabling more effective leadership, improved coordination, and enhanced capacity to deliver on the strategic

goals set out in the NPWS Strategic Action Plan 2022–2024.

The structure has proven critical in supporting the organisation's evolving role in nature conservation, heritage protection, and service delivery throughout 2024.



### NPWS Organisational Structure



## Our Management Committee

The NPWS Management Committee is composed of the Director General and seven Directors, each of whom leads a functional Directorate and plays a key role in the executive leadership of the organisation.

The Committee is responsible for ensuring strong organisational governance, setting strategic objectives, and making decisions on key business and policy matters. It also provides leadership in overseeing the day-to-day operations of the NPWS, ensuring alignment across Directorates and driving delivery of our priorities.

The Management Committee met weekly throughout 2024, providing consistent oversight and agile decision-making to support the organisation's ongoing transformation and operational effectiveness.







## Our Staff

The structure of NPWS is geographically diverse (over 43 offices across all 9 NPWS Regions), and given the breadth of its functions, draws on a wide range of specialised and professional competencies. There are 26 different grades in NPWS encompassing professional, industrial and administration grades, as well as expert managerial and policy-making skills.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) use targeted recruitment to ensure that internal capacity, talent and leadership is developed and strengthened, and that the NPWS has the right people



The collective capabilities of our staff constitute an exceptional resource in the service of the State and in custodianship of our precious national resource

and skills. During 2024, 50 staff were appointed across various grades from open, internal and interdepartmental recruitment.

At the end of 2024, there were 558 permanent staff working in NPWS, an increase of 59% from 350 in 2020 and a 9.6% increase on 2023. The collective

capabilities of our staff constitute an exceptional resource in the service of the State and in custodianship of our precious natural resources, and remain central to our continued achievements.

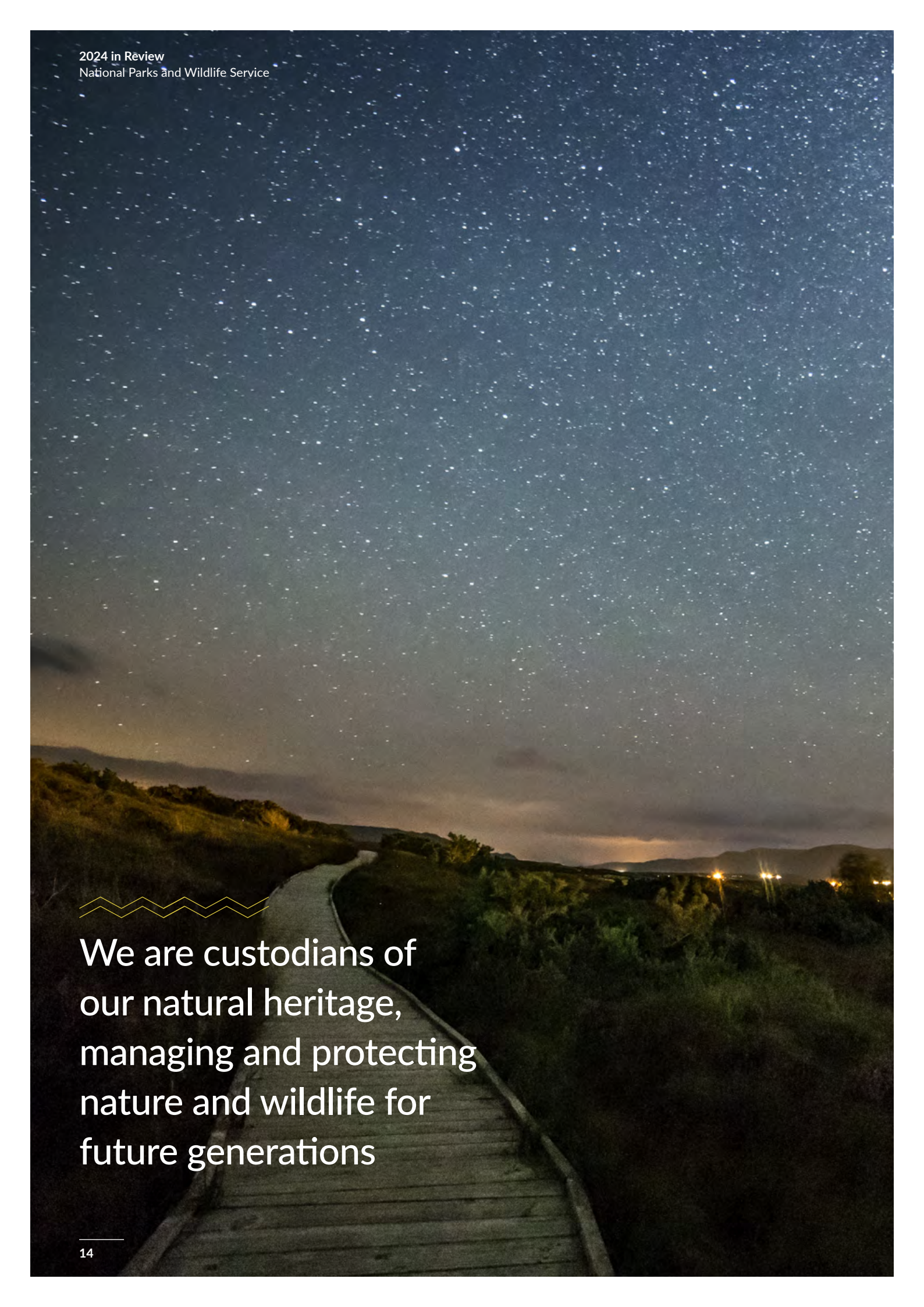


**43** Offices across 9 NPWS Regions



**558** Permanent staff



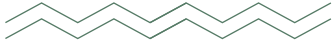


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We are custodians of  
our natural heritage,  
managing and protecting  
nature and wildlife for  
future generations



# Our Work



Building on the priorities set out in the NPWS Strategic Plan 2023–2025, 2024 marked a year of significant progress in delivering against our core mission and strategic objectives.

**THE STRATEGIC PLAN**, developed as a direct outcome of our Strategic Action Plan 2022–2024, has provided a strong framework for guiding our work across biodiversity protection,

heritage management, and organisational development.

Throughout 2024, the NPWS focused on translating the Plan's priorities

into tangible outcomes, driving key initiatives that showcase our enhanced capacity and commitment to advancing biodiversity conservation and heritage protection.

## Strategic Priorities

- 1 **Provide excellent scientific advice**, to the NPWS, the Minister and the Government to support the protection of nature.
- 2 Drive, support and manage **excellence in nature conservation** in Ireland.
- 3 **Safeguard nature and help prevent wildlife crime** through enhanced supports, operations, policies, education and awareness.
- 4 **Manage our national parks and nature reserves** for nature conservation as well as for education and public access for the enjoyment of nature.
- 5 Deliver a strong, effective **legislative basis for nature protection**.
- 6 **Develop and deliver excellent internal and external engagement** and strong corporate governance and business supports.
- 7 **Support nature protection** through excellent EU and international engagement.



## Strategic Priority 1

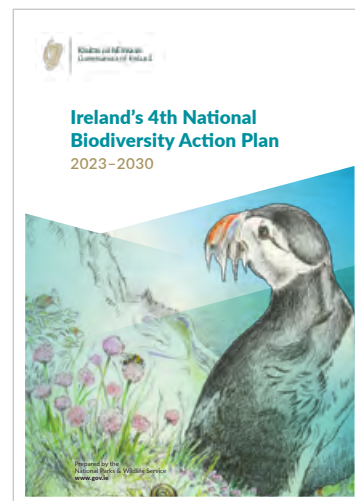
Provide excellent scientific advice, to the NPWS, the Minister and the Government to support the protection of nature.

NPWS continued to undertake essential scientific work to underpin reporting obligations and conservation management of habitats and species throughout 2024.

- Detailed site-specific conservation objective documents published for a total of 519 Natura 2000 sites (439 SACs and 80 SPAs), with an ongoing programme of work to complete those for the remaining SPAs in the first half of 2025.
- Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023-2030 was published in January 2024 and sets out Ireland's vision for biodiversity, namely that by 2050 "Biodiversity in Ireland is valued, conserved, restored and sustainably used, maintaining ecosystem services,

sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people".

The development of the Plan was the subject of significant effort over a two year period, through engagement with stakeholders and with the support, advice and input of the interdepartmental Biodiversity Working Group and the Biodiversity Forum. This is the first National Biodiversity Action Plan that is backed by legislation, with legal requirements for public bodies to consider biodiversity in the







Action to address the threats to the Hen Harrier are accelerating

performance of their functions and to report on actions in support of the objectives of the Plan.

- Several survey and monitoring programmes of EU protected habitats and species were undertaken to underpin 2025 EU Article 17 and Article 12 reporting obligations.
- The Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan was launched in September. The plan outlines the main threats and pressures affecting Hen Harrier in Ireland, and proposes a series of cross-cutting sectoral actions to address and prevent its

further decline. There is significant stakeholder interest in the Plan, and through its delivery, Ireland is signalling its commitment to meeting obligations under the Birds Directive to protect and conserve Hen Harrier.

- Commencement of the Breeding Waders EIP, a partnership between NPWS and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- Closure of 'The Birds Case', Case C 418/04, Commission v Ireland on culmination of over a decade of significant investment in bird conservation.

- 11 Irish Wildlife Manuals published, bringing the total available manuals to 157 [www.npws.ie/publications/irish-wildlife-manuals](http://www.npws.ie/publications/irish-wildlife-manuals).
- Scientific and practical advice and research continued to be provided in relation to management for nature in an agricultural context. This is done through research projects, outreach (e.g. Farming For Nature), the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme and engagement with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on ACRES, EIPs and other initiatives.



157

Irish Wildlife Manuals  
published to date



519

site-specific conservation  
objective documents  
published



## Strategic Priority 2

Drive, support and manage excellence in nature conservation in Ireland.

Throughout 2024, we demonstrated our commitment to protecting nature in action, through a number of key programmes including:

- Designation of 11 Special Areas of Conservation by Statutory Instrument.
- 90+ Natura 2000 sites implemented conservation measures under the Conservation Measures Programme.
- Pilot Plan agreed with the EU Commission for the collation and delivery of Ireland's Conservation Measures data for over 400 SAC sites, in response to the European Court of Justice Ruling in Case C444/21.
- Increased protection of marine waters in Ireland from 2% to 9%, contributing to the EU Biodiversity Strategy, which included protection of four of the largest Natura sites in the history of the State. This includes the Porcupine Shelf and Southern Canyons, covering 3,000km<sup>2</sup> of marine waters and the North-west Irish Sea. Seas off Wexford SPA was created and awaits completion of the statutory designation process.
- Successful launch of the newly expanded Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme (PNCES): €458k in grant funding was awarded to 36 groups under the PNCES in 2024.
- Peatland habitat restoration measures were completed on an area of more than 565 hectares across eight protected raised bog sites throughout 2024 under NPWS programmes, with preparatory works undertaken on additional



# €458k

in grant funding awarded  
under the PNCES in 2024



# 565ha

of peatland habitat  
restoration measures  
completed







sites within the raised bog Special Areas of Conservation and Natural Heritage Area network.

- Tóchar Wetlands Restoration, a three-year wetlands restoration project, co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the EU Just Transition Fund Programme, focused initially on the midlands and the Just Transition territory in 2024. This project takes its name from the hundreds of ancient paths or toghers laid across the bogs by our ancestors. The NPWS, by bringing participants on a nature restoration journey, to ensure the investment in wetlands and their stakeholders, makes a positive impact in as many communities as possible.
- In April, Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara, Ciarraí was launched, bringing together a suite of sites around the Dingle peninsula and nearby Kerry waters. The new Páirc (Ireland's eighth and largest), unites some of Europe's most ecologically valuable places, in celebration of nature across 70,000 acres of lands and seas.

It brings together new acquisitions by the NPWS, such as the Conor Pass, the Owenmore River catchment, lands at Mount Brandon and the sand dune system at Inch Peninsula. The landscapes, islands and seas of this region are of enormous significance for biodiversity. Alongside its seven sister parks, Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara, Ciarraí will be a flagship for the protection and restoration of these incredible places and the globally important array of wildlife that they are home to. The UNESCO World Heritage property of Sceilig Mhicil is at the heart of the Páirc's cultural heritage. The Páirc will honour the island and coastal communities who live alongside it by ensuring that their unique tapestry of cultural and natural heritage is central to the future story of this special place.

We look forward to working with our partners, the Office of Public Works, the National Monuments Service, the Commissioners of Irish Lights, BirdWatch Ireland, Kerry

County Council and the local communities to realise a truly world class National Park.

- LIFE Programme
  - The LIFE Programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action. Throughout 2024, the NPWS continued to administer and support partners in 7 LIFE projects, including leading on LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature, Corncrake LIFE, and LIFE on Machair, all of which aim to protect and restore Ireland's precious habitats and species.
  - LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature continued its partnership on Peatland Restoration with The Northern Ireland Environment Agency and NatureScot, funded through the Shared Island Initiative.





## Strategic Priority 3

Safeguard nature and help prevent wildlife crime through enhanced supports, operations, policies, education and awareness.

Wildlife protection is fundamental to the work of NPWS, and the organisation has never been more focussed or more determined in tackling it. A dedicated Unit for Wildlife Crime was established in 2023 and staff are working across all regions of the country to address wildlife crime. 2024 saw a number of key achievements:

- Enhanced collaboration and cooperation with other enforcement agencies such as An Garda Síochána, including a Wildlife Crime Workshop held in the Garda Training Centre in Templemore, joint checkpoints and other regional meetings and training events.
- Regular and targeted patrols and monitoring by NPWS to help deter and detect wildlife crime continued throughout 2024.
- 30 new prosecutions for alleged breaches of wildlife legislation were initiated by NPWS in 2024, with the Chief State Solicitors office and 29 cases were heard in the Courts.
- A new enforcement mailbox [WildlifeEnforcement@npws.gov.ie](mailto:WildlifeEnforcement@npws.gov.ie) was created in 2024 for the reporting of wildlife crime to NPWS, as well as either through local NPWS offices or An Garda Síochána.
- Management of a Plenary Proceedings case against the State is ongoing.
- Conclusion of a long standing arbitration case resulting in the State purchase of designated lands.



Wildlife protection is fundamental to the work of NPWS, and the organisation has never been more focussed or more determined in tackling it







- NPWS as the Managing Authority for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora issued c. 2,400 Certificates, Permits for species listed in the CITES appendices
- CITES: Ireland was represented at the Animals and Plants Committees meeting in Geneva in July 2024.

- Conservation Management of grey partridge and other farmland bird species continued at NPWS lands in Boora Co. Offaly, with the announcement to establish it as a National Nature Reserve for Farmland birds. Significant engagement with the large population on conservation matters in the Dublin, Meath and Louth area.

- The newly reopened Clara Bog Visitor Centre in Co. Offaly showcases Clara Bog, one of the best examples of a raised bog in Western Europe.
- Peatlands Turf Compensation – 3,170 payments made under the Cessation of Turf Compensation Scheme in 2024, including new applications approved and paid in 2024 with additional applicants approved and paid under the Protected Raised Bog Incentive Scheme. This will support the conservation of protected raised bogs and the restoration of further designated sites in 2025.
- Enhanced Decommissioning Rehabilitation and Restoration Scheme (EDRRS). With NPWS as Regulator, in 2024, rehabilitation work commenced on an additional 2,771ha of former industrial peatlands under EDRRS, which is funded under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. This brings the total area of peatland having undergone rehabilitation measures since EDRRS commenced in 2020, to 18,861ha.



30

new prosecutions for  
alleged breaches of  
wildlife legislation  
in 2024



3,170

payments were made  
under the Cessation of Turf  
Cutters Compensation  
Scheme



## Strategic Priority 4

Manage our national parks and nature reserves for nature conservation as well as for education and public access for the enjoyment of nature.

Throughout 2024, our National Parks and Nature Reserves continued to be an inspiration, growing their education offering and facilities so that the public can access, appreciate and enjoy nature. Key achievements include:

- Significant capital works and trail management, primarily related to public health and safety at our National Parks and Nature Reserves, including restoration works at Lord Brandon's Tower in Killarney National Park.
  - This year saw continued investment in invasive species control across our National Park sites, with a particular focus on Killarney National Park. Adequate investment in this area continues to be a top priority, in order to address the constant pressure exerted by invasive species, which have both significant environmental and health and safety impacts within the National Parks system.
  - The publication of the Glenveagh Woodland Strategy and initiation of actions (e.g. seed collection and propagation, tree planting, invasive species management, fencing, deer management, nature awareness programmes, and woodland flora monitoring).
  - White tailed eagle release in Killarney National Park continuing the re-establishment of a population of this once extinct species.
  - In Wicklow Mountains National Park, the volunteer programme continued all year, with 44
- ~~~~~
- This year saw continued investment in invasive species control across our National Park sites, with a particular focus on Killarney National Park







# 2,200

volunteer hours spent  
in Wicklow Mountains  
National Park



# 600

acres extension to  
Connemara National Park

volunteer days (approx. 2,200 volunteer hours) restoring bare peat at some high altitude and inaccessible areas of the Park, blocking drains and planting gullies.

- Our new Brú na Bóinne National Park completed baseline biodiversity surveys and began work on scoping the Park Master Plan with partners in the National Monuments Service and the Office of Public Works, with a view to moving to more conservation focused management in 2025.
- The 600-acre extension of Connemara National Park this year, extending the Park in both directions, towards Clifden and Kilemore as well as the acquisition

of 30ha at Knockma Nature Reserve for woodland planting.

- The approval and commencement of the new walking trail – the Lime Kiln Trail – in Connemara National Park.
- The Public consultation on the future of our National Parks was launched in Wicklow Mountains National Park in October – ‘Your Parks, Your Say’ is the first phase of a national conversation to inform the definition, purpose and management of our National Parks.
- Progress on staffing at our National Parks and Nature Reserves including the:
  - appointment of new Regional Managers for Glenveagh National

Park and the new Brú na Boinne National Park;

- filling of District Conservation Officer, General Operative and Guide positions nationally;
- expanding the Ranger team and enhancing their skills, sharing their knowledge and building their confidence in positive conservation action, including through a new pilot Law Enforcement Training module, developed by the Wildlife Enforcement and Nature Protection Directorate and hosted in the South East Division.





## Strategic Priority 5

Deliver a strong, effective legislative basis for nature protection.

NPWS continued in its work to review and update relevant legislation, to ensure Ireland's laws better protect nature, comply with EU law and are easier and clearer in terms of compliance and enforcement.

- The Wildlife Licencing Unit (WLU) successfully launched the Heritage Licencing Portal in June 2024. Over 6,600 deer hunting licence applications were processed fully online.
- The WLU continues to provide the secretariat and contributes to the Sustainable Hunting of Wild Birds Stakeholder Forum and the Irish Deer Management Strategy Group.
- In September, the Legislation Unit concluded a first phase of public consultation on a review and update of wildlife legislation and associated regulations. 287 submissions were received dealing with a vast array of issues. The Unit also held preliminary consultation with 20 stakeholder groups in 2023 and 2024.
- Delivery of Statutory Instrument to extend the deer hunting season.
- 59 zoos are licenced by NPWS, and a suite of annual zoo inspections were completed throughout the year.
- National Appropriate Assessment Forum held in April and October including representation from 25 public authorities.



NPWS continued in its work to review and update relevant legislation, to ensure Ireland's laws better protect nature







## Strategic Priority 6

Develop and deliver excellent internal and external engagement and strong corporate governance and business supports.

Throughout 2024, the Corporate Affairs Directorate continued to support the NPWS and the Department in our mission to Protect Nature and support organisational sustainability. A number of key deliverables were achieved in 2024:

- Implementation of the NPWS Strategic Action Plan 2022-2024.
- 14 Strategic High Nature Value land acquisitions, totalling over 1,800 Hectares across 9 counties. This includes the acquisition of the Conor Pass, Co. Kerry as well as expansions to several of the existing National Parks.
- Provision of NPWS branded work wear to all staff nationwide to promote the professionalism and brand recognition of the NPWS, while maintaining a safe and healthy work environment.
- Co-ordination of the NPWS participation at public engagement activities, including BTS Young Scientist, National Biodiversity Week, Bord Bia Bloom 2024, National Heritage Week at National Parks and Nature Reserves, National Ploughing Championships 2024.
- 62 Press Releases issued – stories focused on National Parks, conservation, endangered species and habitats and wildlife crime. The most popular stories were Corncrakes, Osprey, Chough, Cuckoo and White-tailed eagles.
- Completion of the Heritage GIS & Remote Sensing Review under Heritage ICT Modernisation and commencement of Phase 1 implementation.
- 130 projects data discoverable through Open Data (<https://data.gov.ie/>)



# 14

Strategic High Nature Value land acquisitions





## Strategic Priority 7

Support nature protection through excellent EU and international engagement.

Throughout 2024, the NPWS actively continued to support nature protection through excellent EU and international engagement.

- The European Union (Invasive Alien Species) Regulations [SI 374/2024] were introduced in 2024. This legislation updates and strengthens the existing legislative framework around the control and management of invasive alien species in Ireland. The Regulations also give effect to the EU IAS Regulation in the national context.
- NPWS successfully led on Ireland's defence of two ECJ infringement cases relating to implementation of the EU IAS Regulation. The new legislation, along with several new pathway action plans, satisfied Ireland's current obligations under the EU Regulation and both cases were withdrawn from Court.
- NPWS played a pivotal role in securing the passage of the Nature Restoration Regulation at the European Council in June. Significant progress was made toward putting in place the required Cross-Departmental structures and an independent advisory committee bringing together cross-sectoral expertise to ensure the timely delivery of the national Nature Restoration Plan and to enable NPWS to carry out its national coordination responsibility for the Plan as mandated by Government Decisions in November 2022 and October 2024.
- NPWS represented Ireland at the meetings of several significant multi-lateral environmental agreements, including UN CMS COP 14 (Conference on Migratory Species, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, February 2024) and UN CBD COP 16 (Conference on Biodiversity, Cali, Columbia Oct/Nov 2024), reflecting Ireland's proactive approach and strengthening of its commitment to tackling global biodiversity issues.

The NPWS actively continued to support nature protection through excellent EU and international engagement







We support nature  
protection through  
EU and international  
engagement

# 2024 in Review



National Parks  
and Nature  
Reserves

**5.5m**

visitors welcomed

**500km**

of trails and walkways  
maintained and upgraded



Land  
Acquisition  
for Nature

**14**

Strategic High Nature value land acquisitions,  
totalling over 1,800 Hectares across 9 counties



Wildlife  
Crime

**Increased collaboration**  
with An Garda Síochána and  
other agencies to combat  
wildlife crime

**30**

new prosecution cases initiated  
for alleged breaches of wildlife  
legislation

**29**

prosecution cases  
under wildlife legislation heard  
in the Courts



Schemes  
for Nature

**221**

Local Biodiversity Action Plan  
projects funded across 31 Local  
Authorities (€2.33m in funding).  
Projects included invasive  
species control, habitat surveys  
and species conservation

**337**

NPWS Farm Plans  
operational (€2.2m budget)

**2,255**

applicants paid under the  
Cessation of Turf Cutting  
compensation Scheme

**€458k**

in grant funding awarded to 36  
groups under the Peatlands and  
Natura Community Engagement  
Scheme (PNCES)





## Licensing & Legislation

**1,880**

statutory referrals dealt with  
by the Ecological Guidance  
and Advice Unit

**9,200**

licences issued across  
28 licence types

**6,600**

deer hunting licence  
applications processed  
fully online

**68**

Zoo inspections completed,  
55 Licences issued

**9,000**

development applications  
processed



## Designated sites

**36**

site-specific conservation  
objective documents  
published for a total of 519  
Natura 2000 sites

**90+**

Natura 2000 sites with  
conservation measures  
implemented under the  
Conservation Measures  
Programme

**11**

Special Areas of Conservation  
designated by Statutory  
Instrument



## European Funding/ Projects

### Continued support

for LIFE programme, 7 Projects,  
including Wild Atlantic Nature,  
Corncrake LIFE, and LIFE on  
Machair

### Increased protection

of marine waters in Ireland  
from 2% to 9%, contributing  
to the EU Biodiversity  
Strategy



## PR and Media

**62**

Press Releases issued



## Public engagement activities

BTS  
**Young Scientist**

Bord Bia  
**Bloom 2024**

**National Ploughing Championships 2024**

**National Biodiversity Week**

**National Heritage Week** at National Parks and Nature Reserves



## Organisational Renewal

Implementation of the  
**NPWS Strategic Action Plan 2022-2024**

Completion of the  
**Heritage GIS & Remote Sensing Review**

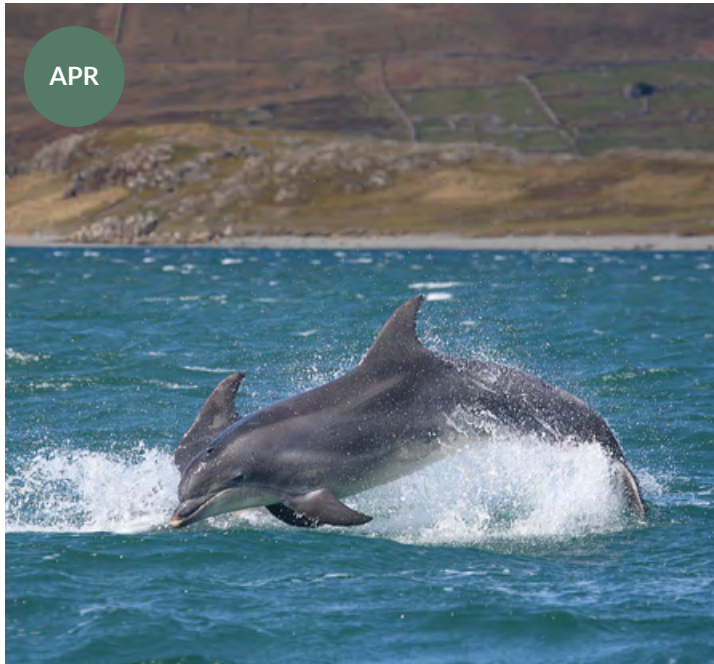
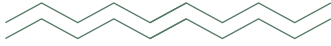
# 130

projects data discoverable through Open Data (<https://data.gov.ie/>)





# 2024 Highlights



## Establishment of Ireland's First Marine National Park

In April, Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara, Ciarraí, Ireland's first Marine National Park, was added to the NPWS portfolio. The new Páirc unites some of Europe's most ecologically valuable places in celebration of nature across more than 70,000 acres of lands and seas, making it Ireland's largest (and eighth) National Park. The Páirc will be dedicated to the protection and restoration of its internationally-significant biodiversity and archaeological heritage.



**70,000**  
acres of lands and seas

## Natura 2000 Day

Bio Blitz 2024 was hosted across a number of sites in Ireland in May, which provided a unique opportunity to raise awareness and engage with the wider public on nature conservation.

MAY

## 2024 Natura 2000 Award

In May, LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature (WAN), led by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, won the 2024 Natura 2000 Award in the category 'Working together for nature'. The Natura 2000 Award highlights projects that demonstrate excellence in nature conservation and sustainable land use. Wild Atlantic Nature is the first Irish project to win such an award.

MAY



## Corncrake LIFE

2024 saw further success with the Corncrake LIFE project which brings together farmers and landowners to improve habitats for corncrakes in the Special Protection Area Network and surrounding farmland. 2024 showed a 40% increase in breeding Corncrake over the past 5 years. In May, over 80 people participated in a workshop, which was launched by Minister Malcolm Noonan and attended by many of the projects farmers and landowners.



## Heritage Licensing Portal

The Wildlife Licencing Unit successfully launched the Heritage Licensing Portal in June. Over 6,600 deer hunting licences applications were processed fully online in 2024.

## Heritage Week

AUG

In August, Minister Noonan invited the public to celebrate National Heritage Week at a National Park or Nature Reserve with over forty events taking place in National Parks and Nature Reserves across the country. Events included walking trails, demonstrations, and educational activities. The theme of National Heritage Week this year was 'Connections, Routes and Networks'.



40+

events took place in National Parks and Nature Reserves

## Ploughing Championship

SEPT

The 93rd National Ploughing Championships took place in Ratheniska, Co Laois, in September. This event provided a fantastic opportunity to showcase our work to protect nature by actively engaging the public in NPWS nature conservation projects, including our EU projects (LIFE); outlining supports and schemes available to the farming community (including Farm Plans and Peatland Conservation) and through a series of visual, interactive stands which bring NPWS work in nature conservation to life.

## Muckross 60

2024 saw Muckross House and the NPWS celebrate the 60th anniversary of the House opening its doors to visitors on June 14th 1964. The celebrations included the NPWS and the Board of Trustees of Muckross House hosting several exhibitions, walks and guided tours with free admission to Muckross House and Muckross Traditional Farms throughout the anniversary weekend (14-16 June).



## Sustainable Visitor Management

Europarcs conference on sustainable visitor management in National Parks was hosted by the NPWS in Westport in October.





## Twinning of National Parks

In October, Wild Nephin National Park in Mayo signed a twinning agreement with Yosemite National Park in California which will see the National Parks and Wildlife Service share knowledge and experience across the Atlantic. The parks will collaborate in areas such as conservation management of habitats and species, habitat restoration and enhancement, nature education and sustainable outdoor recreation.

Connemara National Park also renewed its own twinning arrangement with Terra Nova National Park in Canada, for a further five years. Both parks protect similar ecosystems of bogs, wetlands and woodlands, and protect many common species including the pine marten. There is also a strong historical and cultural connection between the east coast of Newfoundland and Ireland.



## Co. Kilkenny's 5th Nature Reserve

In October, Minister of State for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm Noonan TD, announced his intention to purchase just under 67ha (165 acres) of lands within and adjacent to the Cullahill Mountain Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in Kilkenny, and to designate it as Kilkenny's newest Nature Reserve, Gale's Hill Nature Reserve.

OCT



## Mayo Dark Sky Award

Mayo Dark Sky Park in Wild Nephin National Park was awarded the International Dark Sky Place of the year by Dark Sky International in December. This award is for achievements in global leadership in light pollution reduction, dark sky advocacy and education within and beyond the park boundaries and they have specifically highlighted the Newport project, Mayo DS Festival and the host for ALAN 2025 as being key accomplishments.

DEC

## Burren Winterage Festival

OCT

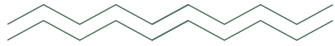
Burren National Park hosted the Burren Winterage Festival in October. At the heart of this celebration is the centuries-old practice whereby local farmers move their cattle to hilltop pastures – or 'winterages' – where they forage and roam until spring. Given the importance of this low-input practice in protecting the Burren's famous flora, 'winterage' has come to embody the broader importance of Irish farmers and farming to society at a time of biodiversity crisis.

## Successful Breeding Projects

2024 was a highly successful year at Cooldross breeding wader site in Co. Wicklow and there were also successes at Kilcoole Little Tern site, Cahore Little Tern site and Lady's Island for breeding Terns. Work at these sites is a long-term effort and every year new challenges are overcome to keep these breeding bird populations thriving.



# Reporting on our Performance



## The Strategic Action Plan 2022-2024

The Strategic Action Plan 2022–2024 was launched in May 2022, fulfilling a key Programme for Government commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of the role and remit of the NPWS. Developed to support and strengthen the NPWS, the Plan set out 46 strategic actions aimed at building a more resilient, better resourced, and more capable organisation—one that can lead Ireland’s response to the biodiversity crisis at both national and international levels.

The overarching objective of the Plan was to equip the NPWS with the structures, systems, and capacity needed to deliver effectively on its core mandate: the conservation, protection, and restoration of Ireland’s natural heritage. It provided a clear roadmap for renewal, ensuring the NPWS is well positioned to act as a central, authoritative force in biodiversity policy and practice.

Through this initiative, the Government signalled its strong commitment to nature and biodiversity, underscoring the importance of a revitalised NPWS that is empowered to lead on conservation, restoration, and advocacy for nature. It recognised the need for a credible, well-supported national body capable of delivering meaningful outcomes for ecosystems, habitats, and species.

The Plan concluded in March 2024, with substantial progress made. The vast majority of actions have been completed or are currently being implemented. As a result, the NPWS is now significantly better placed to meet the challenges and responsibilities of biodiversity conservation in the years ahead.

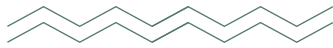


The Plan would equip the NPWS with the organisational capability and supporting structures to enable it to deliver its mandate in protecting our natural heritage.





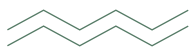
# Financial Overview 2024



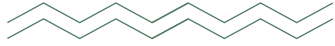
NPWS has seen a significant increase in core funding from €28.7m in 2020 to €69.1 million in 2024. This represents continued commitment to addressing significant historic underfunding of nature and biodiversity and to return investment to 2008 levels.

Total expenditure in respect of the NPWS strategic programmes reached €78 million in 2024.

|                                                             | Estimate Provision 2024<br>€000 | Outturn 2024<br>€000 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| F.5 National Heritage (National Parks and Wildlife Service) | 54,400                          | 56,775               |
| F.8 Peatlands Conservation and Restoration                  | 17,750                          | 21,220               |
| – Estimate provision                                        | 14,750                          |                      |
| – Deferred surrender                                        | 3,000                           |                      |
| <b>Total</b>                                                | <b>72,150</b>                   | <b>77,995</b>        |



# Looking Ahead



2024 marks the end of what was, in many ways, a pivotal year for NPWS and for nature.

**THE PACE OF** change continues to accelerate as the NPWS looks ahead to 2025. Our work remains focused on improving the condition and management of Ireland's 600 designated habitats, ensuring robust protection for our National Parks and Nature Reserves, and strengthening compliance with the Birds and Habitats Directives. In this context, our ongoing reporting under Article 12 (Birds Directive) and Article 17 (Habitats Directive) remains essential for assessing conservation status and shaping effective action.

The Nature Restoration Law will play a transformative role in guiding national efforts to reverse biodiversity

loss. NPWS will be central to its implementation, working across sectors to restore degraded ecosystems and support climate and biodiversity resilience.

We will continue to address critical challenges such as the control and eradication of invasive species, while also managing over five million annual visitors across our Parks and Reserves in a way that balances access with ecological integrity.

Looking ahead, NPWS will also play a key regulatory and advisory role in supporting Ireland's offshore renewable energy targets – ensuring that development is underpinned by

rigorous environmental oversight and nature-positive planning.

Land use will be another core focus. We will contribute strategically to land-use decision-making, including through targeted land acquisitions that support conservation outcomes, biodiversity corridors, and habitat connectivity.

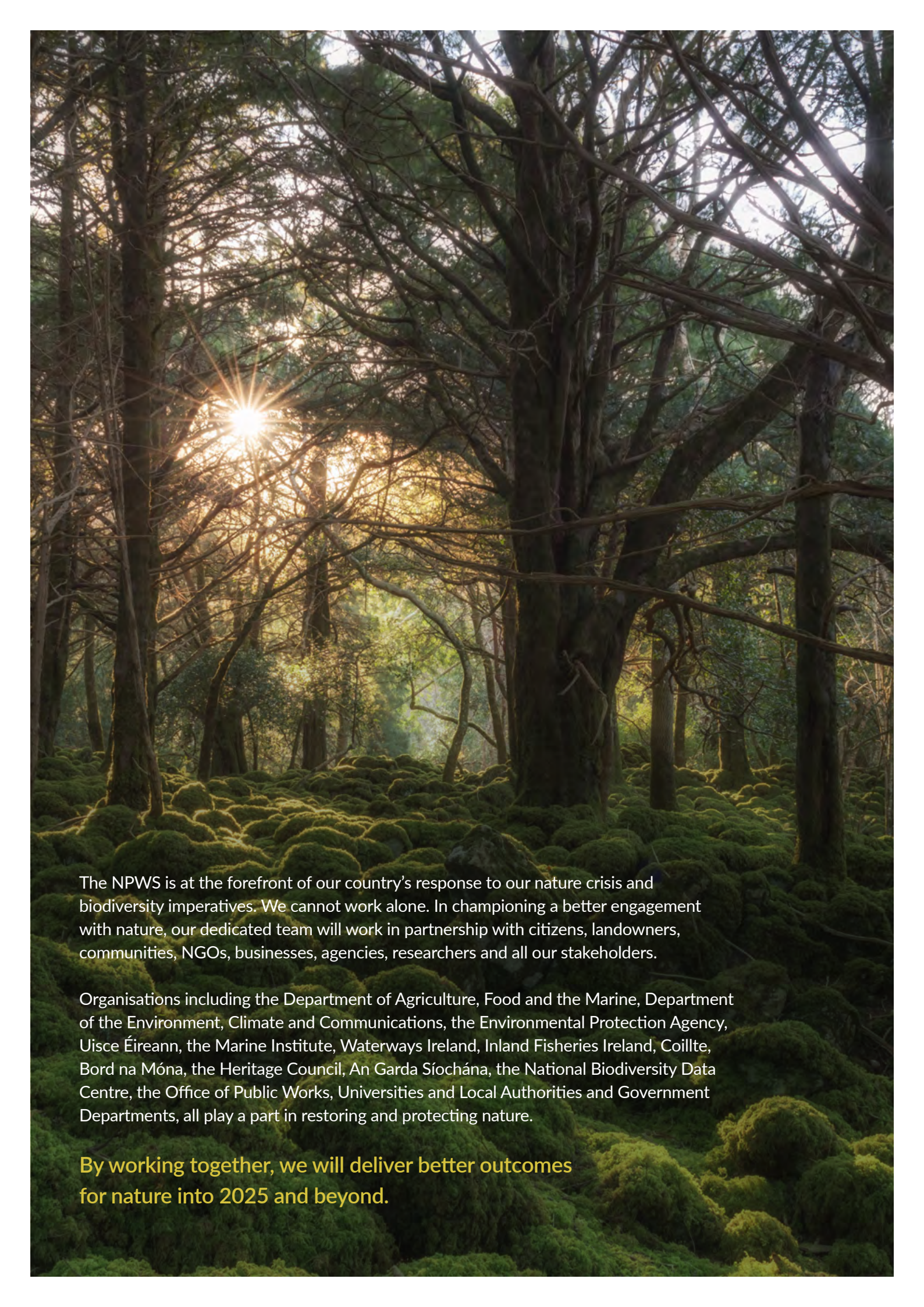
Further, we will continue to combat wildlife crime and expand community-led and agri-environment initiatives. This includes broadening incentives for farmers, landowners, and communities to actively manage and restore nature on their lands – ensuring that local stewardship remains at the heart of national biodiversity action.

As we move into 2025, the NPWS remains committed to delivering measurable outcomes for nature. Building on the progress to date, we will continue to evolve as an organisation – guided by science, supported by policy, and driven by our responsibility to protect Ireland's natural heritage for future generations. The challenges ahead are significant, but so too is the opportunity to lead a transformative national response to the biodiversity and climate crises.



The NPWS remains committed to delivering measurable outcomes for nature. Building on the progress to date, we will continue to evolve as an organisation – guided by science, supported by policy, and driven by our responsibility to protect Ireland's natural heritage



A full-page background image of a forest. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of tall trees, creating a starburst effect in the upper left. The forest floor is covered in thick, vibrant green moss. The overall mood is serene and natural.

The NPWS is at the forefront of our country's response to our nature crisis and biodiversity imperatives. We cannot work alone. In championing a better engagement with nature, our dedicated team will work in partnership with citizens, landowners, communities, NGOs, businesses, agencies, researchers and all our stakeholders.

Organisations including the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, the Environmental Protection Agency, Uisce Éireann, the Marine Institute, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Coillte, Bord na Móna, the Heritage Council, An Garda Síochána, the National Biodiversity Data Centre, the Office of Public Works, Universities and Local Authorities and Government Departments, all play a part in restoring and protecting nature.

**By working together, we will deliver better outcomes for nature into 2025 and beyond.**



NPWS.ie

National Parks & Wildlife Service



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland