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Monaghan Town Habitat Survey

Non-technical summary

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For: Monaghan Tidy Towns Association
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Monaghan Town Habitat Survey

Introduction

This report summarises the findings of a habitat study carried out in Monaghan town by Flynn, Furney Environmental Consultants on behalf of Monaghan Tidy Towns Association. The main purpose of the survey was to review, define and describe the various habitats (places where living things are found) within the urban area of Monaghan town.

A key aim of the survey was to discover which are the more important habitat types. Another was to look at any pressures that these habitats might be under and a third was to make recommendations for how these sites may be maintained, conserved or improved.



Even roadsides can form valuable habitat

What kind of habitats are being surveyed?

Within urban areas, even those that are built up, there can be many habitats and indeed many wild species with which we share our living space. Sometimes these can be 'artificial' or 'constructed' habitats which are man-made but are suitable for habitation by wild species. The eaves of our rooves, for example, can be home to bird and bat species.



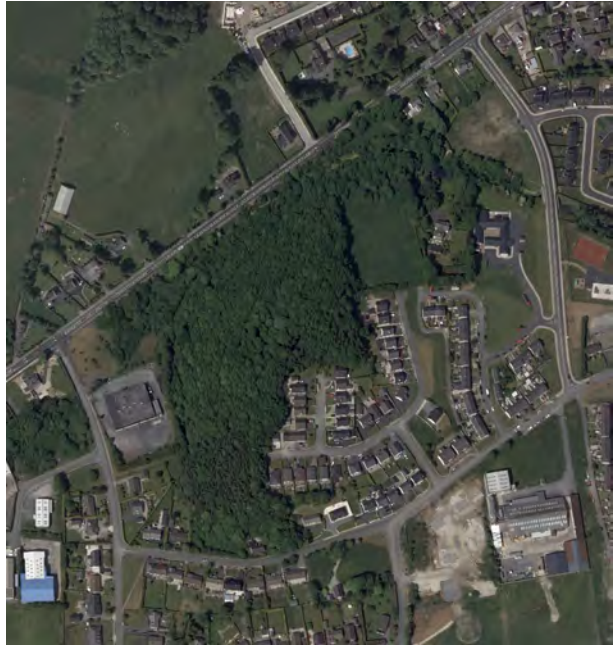
The Ulster Canal at St. Louis' Convent

Older constructed areas such as the Ulster Canal can become very valuable habitat as much of it permanently contains water, it is a long near-continuous area and it links up other habitats. These kind of habitats are often referred to as 'wildlife corridors' and they can be crucial linkages for some species. Other permanently wet places are of great importance also. Monaghan is a lakeland county, the many inter-drumlin areas and heavy soils predisposing us to this habitat type. Monaghan town is no exception- there are two long-existing lakes within the town and several in its hinterlands.

Our roadways can also help to form wildlife corridors and the roadsides of the town were surveyed for this habitat type. Waste ground, graveyards and even larger gardens can be havens for wildlife. These areas may even be more diverse than surrounding countryside, there being little or no pressure from fertilisers, pesticides or regular maintenance.

What did the survey do?

The survey looked for examples of as many habitat types as possible within the area of Monaghan town. The 50 kilometre per hour speed limit signs were taken as a rough outer boundary for the survey – although this was not strictly observed. The ecologist looked at aerial photography of the town which is a very useful means of finding the 'green' areas, water bodies, ungrazed or uncut lands, trees and woodlands. Older (Ordnance Survey) mapping was also examined from earlier periods to examine whether habitat areas are long extant and whether watercourses have been modified.



Tommy Young's Wood, from the air. Monaghan County Council helped with aerial photography

Around twenty-five sites were surveyed in all. These varied from woodland, roadsides and waste ground to river, stream and lakes. Of these, seventeen were reported on. These sites being considered to be of greater importance.

The main findings of the survey

There is a good diversity of habitat types within Monaghan town. Wetland habitats are well-represented and were generally found to be in good condition. There are two lakes within the study area, Peter's Lake and Convent Lake. Both of these have good marginal vegetation which is relatively undisturbed in the former and hardly at all in the latter. Of the two rivers surveyed, the Blackwater was seen to be a very important example of its habitat type while the Shambles was highly modified. It is nonetheless an important feature. The Ulster Canal is a highly significant habitat although it is dry for some areas and subterranean in another. The canal plays an important role as a wildlife corridor but also as a wetland in its own right.

Otters were found to be active in this canal. The Ulster Canal Park plays another role in terms of people's appreciation of nature.

Woodland habitat was found in Wright's Wood, Tommy Young's Wood and some areas within the grounds of St. Davnet's hospital. The steep sides of the Glen are also wooded and there is a surprising diversity of plants to be found here.



What kind of actions are recommended?

Wooded valley. Roadsides of The Glen

It is often the case that many habitats have become valuable because of the lack of any human intervention and that none is therefore required. However, in the urban environment, people-induced pressures may damage or diminish habitats and require some action to address these pressures.



Japanese knotweed at Peter's Lake

In this instance eleven areas were recommended for some intervention. For example, it is recommended that action be taken to remove some of the non-native species from the habitats surveyed. By removing sycamore from sites such as Rossmore or Tommy Young's Wood, the habitat will be improved for native tree species. Japanese knotweed, a highly invasive plant, should be removed from a number of areas.

The watercourses should be kept as free of debris or rubbish as possible. Some signage alerting people to the value of watercourses like the Blackwater is recommended. Valuable woodland areas should be made stock-proof.

Several areas are recommended for activities which would help to raise awareness of biodiversity in Monaghan town. These include the Ulster Canal, Peter's Lake and Tommy Young's Wood. Events such as walks and outdoor workshops could be held in these places. Some interpretation could be included in future plans.



Fly-tipping in woodland adjacent the Blackwater

For example, a sign showing the most valuable habitats in Monaghan or planning a walking trail of these areas. A simple map may be produced for this.

A number of additional surveys could be carried out which would add to the knowledge of wildlife in the area. Surveys of dragonflies of Monaghan town's wetland areas or kingfishers on the River Blackwater are examples of these.



The northern end of Ireland's only length of underground canal