

Butterfly Conservation



New handling pen at Montiaghs Moss. Credit: Rose Cremin

Butterfly Conservation has been working with a farming family at Montiaghs Moss SAC, whose land holds the core population of Marsh Fritillary at the site.

Discussions have proven fruitful and a capital works programme was delivered in February. This included fencing and the installation of a handling pen to enable grazing to be re-established.

We are extremely proud and excited to have arrived at this point and are looking forward to seeing animals

grazing on the site this summer, pending a check of the ground conditions. Light grazing will open-up the sward and allow the Marsh Fritillary's foodplant, Devil's-bit Scabious, to continue to set seed and flourish which is essential to the survival of this endangered butterfly.

Across the country at Pettigoe Plateau SAC, we have been in discussions with another farmer on managing his site sensitively for Marsh Fritillary.

Larval webs were discovered on his land in February 2018 and, pending consent from NIEA, we hope to deliver some capital improvement works to better manage grazing on key fields for Marsh Fritillary. Fencing will be a feature of the work as will culverting a stream to protect the watercourse at a livestock crossing point.

With work well underway in the two key areas of Montiaghs Moss and Pettigoe Plateau, we have been able to turn our attention to our neighbours and farmers in the Republic of Ireland.

The border counties, particularly of the west, provide crucial breeding habitats for Marsh Fritillary and we're looking forward to engaging with landowners on the threats the species face and, happily, the opportunities that the CABB project brings.

CABB Newsletter

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CABB & CANN staff and advisors examine the new peat dams on the Garron Plateau. Credit: Caroline Marshall

Delivery of CABB, funded by the EU's INTERREG VA Programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), is really gaining momentum.

On the Garron Plateau Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Northern Ireland Water has blocked drains to help restore blanket bog. At Montiaghs Moss SAC Butterfly Conservation has worked with landowners to erect fencing and RSPB NI has been upgrading the fencing and livestock management infrastructure on Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) land. This infrastructure will enable conservation grazing to get the land into better condition for Marsh Fritillary butterflies.

BirdWatch Ireland erected fencing on the Dunragh Loughs/Pettigoe Plateau SAC thus assisting the National Parks and Wildlife Service

(NPWS) to deliver conservation grazing. RSPB Scotland has established fencing on the Muirkirk and North Lowther Special Protection Area to facilitate grazing, has reversed the impacts of plantation forestry on blanket bog habitat at Muirkirk and has also employed a project manager to progress sea wall consolidation works on Islay.

The habitats within our Conservation Action Plan (CAP) sites are being mapped. This data is being used, with input from local landowners, statutory agency staff and stakeholders, to prepare CABB's eight CAPs.

We were delighted to be able to showcase the work delivered to date with our sister INTERREG project, Collaborative Action for the Natura Network (CANN), at a two-day event encompassing visits to Garron and Montiaghs. Learning together helps hone our future actions for wetland restoration.

What is CABB?

CABB is a €4.9m partnership project funded by the EU's INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

By the end of 2021, CABB will:

- ⇒ Deliver 2,228 hectares of blanket bog in improving condition.
- ⇒ Prepare 8 Conservation Action Plans (CAPs) for key peatland sites.
- ⇒ Map habitats at CAP sites.
- ⇒ Improve habitat for Marsh Fritillary, hen harriers and breeding waders.
- ⇒ Share best practice and

Further information

Visit our CABB webpage:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/co-operation-across-borders-for-biodiversity-cabb/>

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Data Protection

RSPB is the data controller for any personal data we hold. We will only use your personal data, on the basis of legitimate interest, to contact you with information about the CABB project which is relevant to you. If you do not wish to receive this newsletter in future, please notify Caroline Marshall at caroline.marshall@rspb.org.uk or 00 44 28 9069 9090.

CABB partners, funders and supporters



CABB is supported by the European Union's INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). Match funding has been provided by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland, the Department of

Northern Ireland Water

In October the Garron Plateau played host to the first CABB-CANN Information Share event with attendees seeing the results of peat damming works and having a tour of the Dungonnell Water Treatment Works. The tour highlighted the considerable work currently undertaken to make water from the reservoir fit for drinking. In years to come, treatment work should be reduced as drain blocking begins to take effect and leads to cleaner water. More recently, contractors completed the final phase of drain blocking. A further 150 wooden and

stone dams were installed on private land in February, bringing the total number to over 1,000. Twenty seven dipwells were installed across the site and fortnightly monitoring enables water levels to be tracked 'before and after' the drain blocking. Over time we should see an increase in water levels and a rewetting of the blanket bog. The final result will be cleaner drinking water, improved habitats for breeding waders and other species and the potential to store more carbon.



Dungonnell Reservoir. Credit: NI Water



Surveying vegetation at Garron. Credit: Peter Lytle

BirdWatch Ireland

Pettigo National Nature Reserve is one of the few remaining extensive intact bogs in Co Donegal. The perimeter fence of the reserve had fallen into disrepair in recent years, making it impossible to implement an effective conservation grazing regime. This led to a decline of the bog and heath habitats, threatening breeding wader species including golden plovers, which they support. BirdWatch Ireland proposed to install a stock-proof fence to allow for a Sustainable Grazing Management Plan (SGMP) to be established by NPWS.

Contractors worked at the site over two months, finishing in early October. Specialist equipment for use on wet ground was deployed to avoid damage to the fragile habitats. A total of 9,961 metres of fence was installed at the isolated location - a huge undertaking!

BirdWatch Ireland is also currently in the planning stages of erecting a new predator-proof fence on a wet grassland site at Long Point on Inch Island, Co Donegal. The proposed fence will be 2.5km long, encloses an area of 14 hectares and is designed to protect a population of breeding waders from mammalian predation during the breeding season.

BirdWatch Ireland will be overseeing a programme of drain blocking at Fiddandarry in the Ox Mountains SAC in Co Sligo. This is aimed at restoring the

hydrological integrity of the blanket bog site owned by NPWS. Consultants will be undertaking a habitat assessment and baseline survey this summer before preparing a drain blocking plan for the contractors. We look forward to seeing this important work getting underway.



New fencing in progress at Pettigo. Credit: Daniel Maloney

RSPB NI

Autumn 2018 saw an extensive programme of habitat improvements at **Montiaghs Moss SAC**. New fencing allowing cattle to graze has made a visible impact on previously rank grassland. The meadows have been further improved through topping dead vegetation and flailing rushes. This will improve overall species composition and benefit the Marsh Fritillary butterfly in particular.

In January, Project Officer Cathryn Cochrane organised an RSPB NI staff team day at Montiaghs Moss delivering extensive scrub clearance.

Montiaghs was also featured on the popular UTV programme *Lough Neagh*. Joe Mahon and his team joined Cathryn and colleague Katy Bell to film the rare Irish damselfly. The show highlighted the role of CABB in recreating a habitat where this species can flourish.

Over at **Pettigoe Plateau**, Katy Bell has been busy collating her species records for 2018. A list of 177 records, including snipe, cuckoos, sandpipers and hen harriers, is now available for this previously under-recorded conservation area. Counts of Greenland white fronted geese took place between November and March, with the November count recording two groups (26 and 47) of the winter visitors.

During the autumn, RSPB volunteers worked with Project Officer Darren Houston to record baseline vegetation and species data for the **Garron Plateau**. Volunteers are vital in the delivery of CABB and another



Netting the Irish Damselfly on UTV. Credit: Brian Campbell

helped to input the large amount of data recorded, enabling future changes in vegetation to be evaluated. Darren also hosted a variety of special interest groups at Garron and he has been meeting local organisations keen to support and promote conservation work at the site.

All our NI Project Officers (POs) have been working closely with local landowners and farmers, giving talks, walking the land and sending regular newsletter updates. Liaison with stakeholders provides vital information for CAP preparation. POs have also been encouraging eligible farmers to secure financial assistance through the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) which opened for applications in March.

RSPB Scotland

Over the past few months the Shiel Farm plantation to bog restoration works were commissioned and the groundwork successfully completed. The former bog is now almost wholly re-wetted and we are looking forward to seeing revegetation in the coming growing season. The outcome of the project was described by an Scottish National Heritage peatland restoration expert as "*impressive, a highlight*". Also on Airds Moss the CABB-funded fencing contract was commissioned and completed, which will provide much improved grazing infrastructure for vegetation management.

Our habitat management demonstration day for land managers had indoor and outdoor elements and was an opportunity for the CABB Project Officer to introduce the project to 26 local farmers and farm consultants. Our visit to the CABB-funded habitat management areas on Common Farm was well-received and generated enthusiastic discussion on the practicalities of vegetation management and its role in conserving ground-nesting wader species.

The substantive draft CAP made considerable progress and achieving CAP conservation measures has been exemplified by the commencement of the large-scale blanket bog restoration on Tardoes Farm. General farming and wildlife advisory work continues through discussions with land managers and farmers on

peatland restoration and agri-environment advice. This included a meeting with the Chair of the Scottish Beef Association to discuss upland grazing and wildlife.



Before: remains of forestry at Shiel Farm
Credit: Clive Walton



After: restored and rewetted blanket bog
Credit: Clive Walton