

# CABB Newsletter

Issue 6: Spring 2022



RSPB Scotland's work on the Loch Gruinart seawall. Credit: Islay Drone Photography

While the continuation of the pandemic brought some obstacles in carrying out CABB's ambitious aims of large-scale habitat restoration, the agility and perseverance of all the CABB partners, including farmers and regulatory staff, ensured that we could continue to deliver on projects that matter for people, climate and biodiversity.

RSPB Scotland completed an upgrade to the 200-year-old Loch Gruinart seawall on the island of Islay in late 2021 (pictured above). It should now prevent the incursion of sea water on to the RSPB's Reserve. The wet grasslands behind the sea wall are designated a Special Protection Area and are vital for overwintering of both barnacle and white-fronted geese and serve as a key site for breeding waders. This important project will help secure a home for wildlife in the midst of growing impacts of climate change.

Butterfly Conservation and RSPB NI have enhanced habitat for Marsh Fritillary at Montiaghs Moss and RSPB NI's reserve there will soon be more accessible to the public thanks to new infrastructure developments.

NI Water is using drones to monitor the many peatland dams installed at Garron Plateau to ensure improved water quality and biodiversity benefits continue. BirdWatch Ireland has completed drainblocking on 444ha of blanket bog in Fiddandarry, located within the Ox Mountains Special Area of Conservation (SAC), to allow for the slow restoration of the peatlands.

As the CABB project moves closer to ending, project partners are engaging statutory agencies and other stakeholders to discuss potential follow-on projects that could extend the foundational work of CABB in restoring peatlands, improving habitat and safeguarding species.

## 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 2022, 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 butterflies, hen harriers and breeding waders.
- ⇒ Share best practice and data.
- ⇒ Raise awareness of peatlands and key species.





## RSPB NI

At Montiaghs Moss Special Area of Conservation (SAC), significant progress has been made on initiatives to improve public access to the reserve. Planning permission has been granted for a new car park and boardwalk, and colourful, engaging interpretation panels are also in production. Together this new infrastructure will bring people closer to the rich array of flora and fauna of Montiaghs Moss, with the formal launch of the new reserve to take place at the end of the year.

Winter work parties organised at Montiaghs last year have made a fantastic contribution to CABB conservation efforts at the site. Enthusiastic teams of volunteers worked hard to manage scrub regrowth and clear litter, and new bird boxes have been installed.

Montiaghs Moss is home to 13 species of dragonflies and damselflies, including the precious and rare Irish Damselfly. At a recent European-wide workshop on the crescent bluet (Irish damselfly) organised by Queen's University Belfast, CABB project officer Cathryn Cochrane presented her valuable knowledge of the species from Montiaghs Moss.

The RSPB have secured funding through the NIEA Challenge Fund to begin a novel conservation grazing trial using Hebridean sheep. This small, lightweight breed is uniquely adapted to the challenging topography at Montiaghs. The sheep will graze a 9ha area to the north of the reserve.

## BirdWatch Ireland

Delivery of the drainblocking on 444ha of blanket bog at Fiddandarry within the Ox Mountains Special Area of Conservation (SAC) near Sligo has been completed which will allow for slow regeneration of the peatlands.

Birdwatch Ireland continued to survey key sites in Counties Sligo and Donegal to assess populations of breeding waders. These surveys are providing important current data on species like lapwing and dunlin, which are known to be in decline across Ireland.



*Curlew Nest Meentygrannagh  
Credit: Daniel Moloney*

Four Conservation Action Plans (CAPs) with habitat mapping have been submitted to the NPWS for final approval including Lough Nillan. Areas covered by the CAPs include: the Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) at Dunragh Loughs/Pettigo Plateau, Croaghonagh Bog, Lough Nillan Bog and Meentygrannagh Bog.



*CABB-funded Soucy tracked tractor ready for cutting  
Credit: Catriona Grant*

At the Lough Erne Lowlands Priority Landscape, large-scale rush cutting works have been carried out during the autumn of 2021. An impressive 75ha of rush was cut, across nine different sites on the Lough. The result is a mosaic habitat extending to a total of 110ha with selected portions of fields having been cut, leaving the remainder untouched. These managed areas of the Lough now boast much improved habitat for our breeding waders returning this spring. The work, carried out by Tom Irvine using CABB's specialist Soucy tracked tractor, has also strengthened ties between CABB and local landowners: it has been heartily welcomed and received high praise from all farmers who received rush cutting.



*Lough Nillan Bog  
Credit: Katie Bell*

New predator-proof fencing is currently being installed at Blanket Nook, a well-known wetland site for waders and at Inch, an important site for breeding waders in Donegal.



## NI Water



*Northern Ireland Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon (centre) visit to Garron Plateau Peatland Restoration Project with Joanne Sherwood, Director RSPB NI and Roy Taylor, Catchment Manager for NI Water  
Credit: Rex Media*

NI Water representatives were delighted to visit to the Garron restoration area along with a class of undergraduates from the University of Ulster at Coleraine, on the 22nd March, to discuss sustainable catchment management.

On the 24th March, NI Water, alongside RSPB NI, hosted Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon at the Garron Plateau Peatland Restoration Project and Dungonnell Reservoir. The Minister had the opportunity to view first hand a completed restoration project on Northern Ireland's largest blanket bog, and to learn more about its positive outcomes for the environment and drinking water quality. They also discussed the progression of a new Peatland Strategy for Northern Ireland. On the same day, NI Water also launched their annual schools poster competition: the theme for this year is the fascinating world of bogs.

## RSPB Scotland

RSPB Scotland has been continuing to manage its Airds Moss reserve at the heart of the Muirkirk Uplands. This has included further management of areas of purple moor grass and soft rush dominated swards through mechanical cutting by double-wheeled tractor, with 82ha managed in November 2021 and a further 25ha in March 2022.

Working with a neighbouring landowner within the Muirkirk Uplands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and, thanks to CABB-funded fencing, RSPB was able to get 8 Highland cattle onto the reserve in late December – the first cattle on the reserve in over 20 years! The mechanical cutting and cattle grazing will improve sward structure and composition for breeding curlew this spring, a priority species for the reserve.

Within the Muirkirk Uplands RSPB has also been working with Dumfries Estate on a joint CABB and NatureScot Nature Restoration Fund funded project to clear invasive Sitka spruce from over 1000ha of the SSSI, where it is estimated that there are in the region of 15,000 self-seeded trees. Felling of these trees will complement previous and future peatland restoration and will create more open habitat for SSSI designated species, particularly Golden Plover.

Over on Islay, the Loch Gruinart seawall was completed in late 2021 (as featured on the front cover). Faced with various delays, the RSPB team and contractors did an excellent job getting the project finished in time for the return of the Greenland white-fronted and barnacle geese last autumn!



*Highland Cow at RSPB Airds Moss. Credit: Stephen Inglis*



*Invasive Sitka spruce. Credit: Stephen Inglis*



# Butterfly Conservation

Butterfly Conservation had a productive winter work party season as restrictions eased, delivering volunteer events with partner RSPB at Montiaghs Moss to manage scrub and improve habitat condition for Marsh Fritillary. Butterfly Conservation also headed cross-border to undertake some discrete scrub and bracken management in counties Leitrim and Cavan on farms where Marsh Fritillary breed. The outdoor work and opportunity to meet in person not only benefitted nature, but was also great for personal morale.

Butterfly Conservation was delighted to see Marsh Fritillary larval webs emerge from hibernation this springtime at Montiaghs Moss Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and to hear reports from other CABB sites across the border. Caterpillars are still found in a collective web at this time of year although, as we move into April, webs will break-up and individuals will eventually leave to pupate singly out-of-sight in the vegetation. Predation remains an issue from other invertebrates such as wasps and shieldbugs but such is the cycle of a healthy ecosystem. To ensure the survival of Marsh Fritillary, we need to work on a landscape scale and with the farmers who work there and as we approach

the finish-line of the CABB project, its legacy is very much in our planning ahead.

As summer approaches, Butterfly Conservation will be continuing its work on the project by meeting with landowners and farmers to network, while discussing the grazing season and monitoring adult Marsh Fritillary on-the-wing. If you have any questions relating to our work on this project, management for Marsh Fritillary or queries on how to get involved, please do get in touch – we'd love to hear from you.



## Further information

Visit our CABB webpage: <http://bit.ly/CABBproject>

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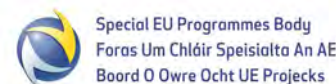
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### Data Protection

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](mailto:caroline.marshall@rspb.org.uk)

## 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 Housing, Planning and Local Government in Ireland, RSPB Scotland and Mines Restoration Ltd.