

## Butterfly Conservation

Whilst the global pandemic disrupted the work of Butterfly Conservation (BC), it also provided opportunity to catch up on planned capital works on core Marsh fritillary sites.

Work at an additional three sites is now complete, with fencing and access improved to aid long-term management for Marsh fritillary. A fourth site will be completed in early 2021. Whilst new infrastructure is essential for effective site management, equally important is working alongside owners and land managers to develop and implement five-year management plans that will ensure the long-term sustainability of sites.

BC was delighted to appoint some additional support to the CABB project. Dr Peter McEvoy joined the team in October and will be supporting Rose Cremin for at least six months to help deliver the aims of the project.

Studies have shown that devil's-bit scabious, the food plant of the Marsh fritillary caterpillar, is not long-lived in the seedbank and some intervention is required to restore it to sites that have been degraded, but that are now being managed and are in improving condition. In an exciting new initiative BC staff and local landowners have harvested seed and are now working with True Harvest Seeds in Co. Down to germinate the seed and propagate plugs to be planted back on site. Some seed is also being scattered on site and plants are being translocated from

adjacent private gardens. Peter and the team will monitor the success of each method of increasing the cover of the plant. High density of devil's bit scabious is key for long-term success of the butterfly.

Have a look at BC's CABB web page [here](#).



Rose Cremin, Dr Peter McEvoy and local farmer at Leitrim  
Credit: Rose Cremin

# CABB Newsletter

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RSPB NI's new Low pressure tracked tractor. Credit: Brad Robson

## Further information

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

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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.

Looking back, 2020 was a challenging year in which to deliver a multi-partner, large scale habitat restoration project. Covid-19 restrictions hampered the delivery of habitat management work on the ground. Restrictions also curtailed species and habitat monitoring, and prevented our Project Officers from getting out and about to familiarise themselves with their sites. Staff were also unable to have those important face-to-face conversations and meetings with farmers, statutory agency staff and other key stakeholders.

Fortunately, every cloud has a silver lining and the CABB team was able to utilise time confined to their immediate surroundings to plan and prepare the documentation to enable quick on-the-ground action when restrictions lifted.

RSPB NI is now in the midst of managing habitat for breeding waders in Lough Erne, using its CABB-funded low pressure tracked tractor. BirdWatch Ireland is delivering predator-proof fencing in Donegal and blanket bog

drain blocking in Sligo. RSPB Scotland has delivered an additional 127 hectares of peatland restoration and Butterfly Conservation has delivered habitat management at another three sites.

As a result of Covid-19, the CABB team now uses virtual platforms for all Board, Delivery Group and Steering Group meetings. Staff have been able to attend and participate in conferences virtually without the financial cost, carbon usage and time associated with travel.

CABB hosted a very successful Information Share and Best Practice virtual event in autumn 2020 with an attendance of over 60 people. We also exhibited our work to 560 delegates at the IUCN's UK Peatland Programme conference in December. These were both excellent opportunities to hear from others, share experiences and knowledge and learn from best practice elsewhere.

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



## RSPB NI

Since our last update the Montiags project officer has been busy installing safety measures for livestock, improving the site for butterflies, damselflies and dragonflies, hosting volunteer work parties to manage scrub and taking part in virtual information sharing events. The installation of fencing and livestock facilities has enabled the grazier to put stock on site knowing that they will be safe. In October, vegetation was removed from 10 choked pools. This resulted in 1,000sqm of open water for key species, such as the Irish damselfly. Between October and December, small groups of volunteers managed regrowth of scrub, following the removal of 11 hectares of scrub last winter. Our project officer has produced an uplifting video showcasing the progress made at Montiags Moss. You can view it by clicking [here](#).

The Garron Plateau and its local farmers will be making headlines once again as it will hopefully feature in a major BBC radio documentary this spring. Meanwhile, our Garron project officer is making great progress on the delivery of the CAP, with a first draft signed off and submitted to NIEA last October. Habitat mapping is picking up the pace as well: we are expecting final maps to be drawn up in early 2021 by the GIS specialist. Attendance at the virtual IUCN Peatland



Garron peat dams in the first snow flurries of the winter  
Credit: Henry McLaughlin

Conference generated lots of new contacts. It also seeded the possibility of NI CABB sites being incorporated into the IUCN Peatland code, along with the prospect of future delivery funding opportunities.

## BirdWatch Ireland

Since 2017, Birdwatch Ireland has been surveying 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. Due to Covid-19 restrictions from early April to mid-May, the survey season was shorter than usual and this may have an impact on the robustness of results. A total of 168 breeding pairs of waders were recorded across 17 sites; 111 pairs of lapwings, nine pairs of oystercatchers, 13 pairs of ringed plovers, 26 pairs of snipe and nine pairs of redshanks. Despite being the most numerous and widespread species, numbers of lapwings still show an overall decline over the last four years. This is due largely to the loss of suitable breeding habitat at Inch, but worrying declines were also noted at several smaller sites. Sadly, no breeding dunlins were noted this year. None of the sites surveyed have had breeding dunlins since at least 1996.

An additional upland survey was also done at five selected sites, also in Donegal and Sligo. Breeding territories for six species of waders were recorded, including common sandpiper, snipe and curlew. Our spring newsletter reported that two curlew chicks hatched from a nest at Meentygrannagh containing four eggs. The pair were regularly observed foraging close to the nest for the first two weeks. The male then brought the chicks in a north easterly direction, where they remained for a further week. Sadly one dead chick was located during a walkover the following day. Mammalian predation (potentially badger) is thought to



Fence protecting lapwing chicks at Maghergallan  
Credit: Michael Bell

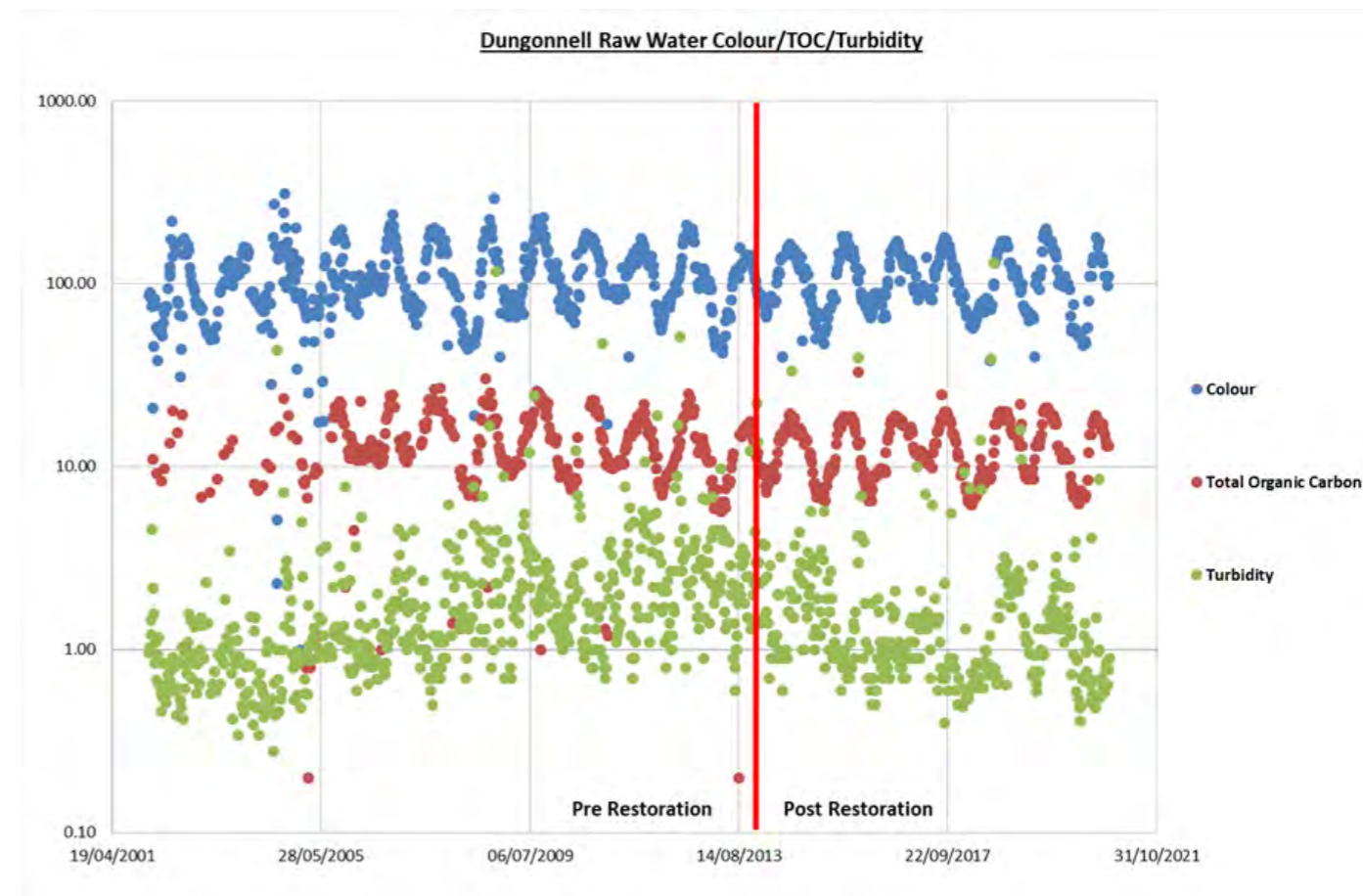
be the most likely cause, and the adult male abandoned the site within 24 hours.

At Dunragh Loughs/ Pettigo Plateau SAC in Donegal, Eibhlín, who only came into post at the beginning of 2020, continues to prepare the CAP. When Covid-19 restrictions have permitted, the project officer has familiarized herself with the habitat and wildlife. There have been reports of a golden eagle, hen harrier and even a red throated diver spotted on the land. As part of efforts to improve and maintain the habitat and its biodiversity, grazing of the nature reserve land within the SAC has continued.

## NI Water

NI Water has been monitoring various qualities of the water coming into Dungonnell Water Treatment Works linked to the Garron Plateau CABB site in Northern Ireland. NIW test the 'raw' water (water taken from the reservoir to be treated) regularly for a number of parameters. The parameters of 'colour', 'turbidity' and 'total organic carbon' (TOC) are all tested to keep track of the organic content of the water, or the amount of carbon in it.

Since the Garron Plateau bog restoration began in 2014, colour, turbidity and TOC levels have all reduced in range. This means that the raw water quality from the reservoir is less unpredictable (although there are the usual seasonal changes from summer to winter). There have also been fewer very high concentrations since the restoration finished. This makes it easier to treat the raw water and will hopefully lead to financial savings in power and chemicals for NI Water. We hope that this water quality improvement will continue as the bog re-establishes.



## RSPB Scotland

Our project officer at Muirkirk, has worked hard to complete two more capital works projects for CABB sites in Scotland.

Peatland restoration works at Wetherhill, part of Tardoes Farm are now complete. The restoration interventions on this 48 hectare site include bare peat hag reprofiling, peat damming, timber damming and sitka spruce regeneration removal.

Techniques, including peat bunding at Kyle Farm within Dumfries Estate, will contribute to delivering peatland restoration on a 77 hectare site.



Completed peat dam at Muirkirk. Credit: Stephen Inglis