

## Butterfly Conservation

Throughout last winter, Butterfly Conservation has been working with a landowner in County Cavan whose fields provide suitable habitat for the Marsh Fritillary. Andy has been farming with nature for many years; however much needed repairs were now required to secure some fencing and gates and prevent straying stock. The work was undertaken sensitively in February 2020, and we are looking forward to visiting the site in late summer to monitor the Marsh Fritillary populations.

Over at Montiaghs Moss SAC, Co. Antrim we continued to support our partners, the RSPB and local farmers. We returned for a winter work party in January 2020 to manage scrub, following-up the capital works programme delivered in February 2019. Staff and volunteers from other organisations, including Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership Scheme (LNLPS) and the Youth Justice Agency, lent their support on the day. It was a productive, satisfying and fun day which certainly demonstrated the edict of 'many hands make light work'.

It's exciting to know that with winter behind us, we can soon expect to see adult Marsh Fritillary and other butterflies, moths and insects on-the-wing. Marsh Fritillary typically begin to emerge from their pupal stage around mid-May and may be seen up to the end of June.

Due to COVID-19, Butterfly Conservation advises that you do not leave home to record butterflies and moths. This is not a permitted reason to leave home and would

be in breach of government restrictions. Marsh Fritillary will be there, waiting in our special places when we come out of this. Recording of butterflies and moths seen at home, or when leaving home for permitted purposes (in line with Government information), can continue. We also have an active Facebook page where you can follow and compare what others are finding in their gardens. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ButterflyConservationNI/>



Scrub clearance at Montiaghs Moss in January. Credit: Rose Cremin

# CABB Newsletter

Issue 4: Spring 2020



Curlew eggs at CABB site in Donegal. Credit: Daniel Moloney

## 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](mailto: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 Housing, Planning and Local Government in Ireland, RSPB Scotland and Mines Restoration Ltd.

Spring 2020 may be remembered for lockdowns and restrictions, but we can report some good news too, with lots to celebrate from CABB.

People have found solace from watching spring unfold and from listening to bird song in their gardens. The tranquillity of our local green spaces has offered time to reflect on, and connect with nature.

Our natural heritage is amazing and despite the lockdown, CABB is continuing to conserve and celebrate the nature of our wonderful and special landscapes in Ireland, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

At Magherallon, one of our CABB sites in Donegal, curlew chicks have hatched, and we are hopeful that these will fledge and bolster the breeding curlew population in future years.

RSPB Scotland has added to the good news. The Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for the Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands Special Protection Area (SPA) has been signed off by Scottish Natural Heritage. This is the first of eight CAPs that will be

produced by the CABB project. CAPs are the blueprints to getting the habitat of designated places into good condition so that the species that depend on them can thrive. RSPB Scotland has also completed the second phase works at the Tardoes site, delivering over 800 hectares of valuable peatland now in recovering condition.

In Northern Ireland habitat management works have continued at Montiaghs Moss. The RSPB, Butterfly Conservation and our fantastic band of volunteers are looking forward to the lifting of restrictions on movement so that we can get out to monitor the numbers of marsh fritillary butterflies.

The project has seen several staff changes since our last update. We say goodbye to Clive Walton and Nick Duff and thank them for all their hard work over the years. We welcome Eibhlín McKeever and Gareth Bareham to the CABB team. They will deliver the CAPs for the Dunragh Loughs/Pettigo Plateau Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Garron Plateau SAC respectively.

### 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 Scotland

The second phase of the peatland restoration works at Tardoes Farm in East Ayrshire, funded by Peatland Action, was completed in December 2019. This brings the total restored area at the site to 800 hectares. A third phase, comprising an additional 25 hectares, is being drawn up and is expected to be completed later in the year.

Vegetation management to improve habitat for breeding curlew has continued at RSPB Airds Moss reserve. As part of an ongoing research programme, over 30 hectares of dense rush has been cut to open up the sward and provide better foraging and nesting opportunities for curlew. During the 2019 nesting season several curlew nests were found in areas of rush cut the previous winter, suggesting this management is proving beneficial. Some areas of taller heather have also been cut and the cuttings from this have been used to assist with the revegetation of the forest to bog restoration area at the reserve. The cuttings should provide physical protection as well as a seed source, which we hope will accelerate the revegetation process.

The final modifications to the Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for the Muirkirk and North Lowther Special Protection Area (SPA) were made and we are delighted to say that the CAP has been signed off by Scottish Natural Heritage.

Clive Walton, our Project Officer at Airds Moss since 2017, moved on from his part-time post with CABB at the end of February. He will now concentrate full-time on his role as Ecologist with RSPB Scotland. Clive's many successes, including developing the CAP and overseeing 800 hectares of blanket bog restoration at Tardoes, will long be remembered. We wish him well in his new role!

Stephen Inglis continues in his advisory role at Muirkirk.



CABB Conservation Advisor Clive Walton (centre) with contractors at Tardoes farm in East Ayrshire. Credit: Clive Walton

## BirdWatch Ireland



Lapwing chick at Sheskinmore. Credit: Daniel Moloney

raise the water table; this is the first step in getting the designated site into better condition to store water, store carbon to mitigate climate change and provide the necessary habitat for the species that depend on blanket bog.

This year, for the first time since 1994, we were delighted to observe lapwing breeding on the BWI Reserve area at Sheskinmore, which has been fenced and is now being maintained by CABB. Three pairs nested, with at least two broods of chicks observed in mid-May.

The staff who have worked tirelessly to restore the lapwing population at this site since 2012 were delighted. Daniel Moloney, CABB Senior Breeding Wader Advisory Officer said "To see an increase in numbers since 2012 has been very rewarding, and to have had lapwing back breeding on our own reserve this year was the icing on the cake."

However, to our great dismay, we discovered that over the weekend of 23rd/24th May badgers had dug under the fence, which is buried below the surface. By Monday morning all signs of breeding lapwing were gone. Presumably the badgers took all the chicks and any remaining eggs. All the adults had left. Of course this is nature in the raw. We will revisit the site with a view to making the fence badger proof in the hope that the lapwing will return.

The good news is that curlew are nesting at the CABB site at Meentygrannagh, Co Donegal. We have erected a temporary electric fence around the nest in the hope that chicks fledge and bolster the breeding population of curlew.

## RSPB NI

The beginning of 2020 saw Gareth Bareham take the helm as our new Project Officer for the Garron Plateau Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Gareth will be building upon the superb legacy of his predecessor Darren Houston.

The extensive drain blocking works of the last 3 years are already proving impactful, with visible changes now pointing to a positive transformation of the bog in years to come.

This wooden drain grip in a single section of drain (pictured right), helps to raise the water table and re-establish keystone species such as sphagnum, and hence, encourage active bog development.

Within the catchment of Dungonnell Dam, land owned by Northern Ireland Water is now being managed under a new grazing agreement. A simple reduction in sheep grazing pressure is showing notable positive impacts in key indicators of bog recovery, with improvements in vegetation diversity and structure.

Gareth's key role is to complete the Garron Plateau CAP. He will continue to foster strong alliances with the local farming community, will encourage and support farmers to enter agri-environment schemes and will work to include landowners in commonage areas.

Weather plays a major part in carrying out works, and unfortunately the reality is that it does not always play in our favour. During the peak management period for rush cutting, the Lough Erne focus area was inundated with flood water, leaving rush management in key areas limited due to machinery access issues.

It was not all doom and gloom though: during this delay we managed to form a key working relationship with the land manager onsite at Belle Isle Estate Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) who is keen to work with us in the future on both Belle Isle in Upper Lough Erne and Devenish in the Lower Lough.



Montiaghs Moss landowner event. Credit: Katy Bell



Wooden drain grip at Garron. Credit: Gareth Bareham

Over at Montiaghs Moss SAC, a contractor was appointed to undertake additional fencing works, ditch clearance and scrub work. Luckily all planned scrub removal was successfully completed just before water levels rose at the end of February. This work will have positive impacts on the biodiversity features of the site, providing additional breeding habitat for dragonflies, damselflies and the marsh fritillary butterfly.

Both Conservation Action Plans (CAPs) for Pettigo Plateau and Montiaghs Moss SACs are being reviewed internally by RSPB. Our project officer Cathryn Cochrane will make final amendments before they are submitted to NIEA for sign off.

Cathryn hosted an open event for local landowners and residents. 47 attendees gathered to hear about the progress made by CABB at Montiaghs Moss, and what plans are in store for the future. With talks by Katy Bell (Ulster Wildlife), Rose Cremin (Butterfly Conservation) and Michael Meharg (Fieldfare Ecology) (pictured left), it was a highly successful evening.

RSPB NI secured additional funding from Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to purchase bog mats for use at Montiaghs Moss. These will be installed at wet crossing points on the site to provide essential access for machinery and livestock used in conservation grazing. Mats help minimise the damage to the ground and ensure safe crossing points for machinery.

Meanwhile, Cathryn is researching and gathering ideas in order to formalise public access to the site. Watch this space...

## NI Water

NI Water has completed all its drain blocking works and awareness raising activity at Garron. We will share the more long term impacts of the drain blocking in future editions of this newsletter.