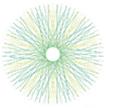




An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



"The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas"



eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT

HEN HARRIER PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT

YEAR 2: MAY 2018 - APRIL 2019



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Glossary



BPS	Basic Payment Scheme
DAERA NI-	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Northern Ireland
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
GLAMS	Generic, Land Management System
GMIT	Galway Mayo Institute of Technology
HHP	Hen Harrier Project
ITAG	Information Technology Association Galway
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service

ANNUAL REPORT 2017 / 2018



HEN HARRIER PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT

YEAR 1: MAY 2017 - APRIL 2018

The Hen Harrier Project Annual Report for Year 1 is available online via our website and provides a summary of the Project's activities in our first year of development and operation.

Available at the following link:
<http://www.henharrierproject.ie/HHPAR2017.pdf>



Advisor Training

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Phase Two 2018

Four Phase 2 training courses were delivered to complete training for the initial Advisor intake. This training focused on the use of the scorecards in the field, including the identification of indicator species assessment of cover abundance, habitat structure assessment and various other elements of the Programme including Annual Works Plans. Two were delivered in Lyreacrumpane, Co. Kerry and two in Derrybrien, Co. Galway.

There was an exam at the end of the course to ensure a minimum standard of competence among approved Advisors.

A total of 70 Advisors received full approval as Hen Harrier Programme Advisors after these courses.

Phase One 2019

The number of advisors fell during the course of the year due to retirements, transfers and inactivity. This along with a number of enquiries from advisors seeking to get involved in the Hen Harrier Programme led to a decision to provide an additional course. A Phase 1 Advisor Training Course was held in Limerick on March 5th and 6th March 2019. Phase 1 Advisor training followed the same syllabus as in 2018. The number of advisors who attended Phase 1 training in and who received provisional approval was 18. This brings total advisor numbers up to 86.

Note: Phase 2 training was provided for these advisors in Lyreacrumpane, Co. Kerry on May 28th & 29th 2019. A total of 16 new advisors successfully completed Phase 2 training in 2019 and were fully approved as Hen Harrier Programme Advisors.

Advisor Seminars

De-briefing seminars for advisors were held in the Hodson Bay Hotel, Co. Roscommon on October 3rd and the Devon Inn Hotel, Templeglantine Co. Limerick on October 4th 2018. This allowed the advisors to feedback into the ongoing development of the Programme following their experiences in the 2018 field season. A workshop focussed on advisor capacity, communications between the Project Team and advisors and on technical supports that could be provided for advisors in their work.

Payments

2019

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Participant Funds not yet Issued

On April 30th 2019 the Hen Harrier Project held € 8,481.49 in funds due to participants in respect of habitat payments. A further € 1,305.27 was held in respect of the Hen Harrier payment. These consisted of three participants yet to receive the habitat payment and two who were yet to receive the Hen Harrier Payment due to them by that date.

One of the outstanding Habitat payments involved a deceased participant whose estate have not provided instructions for how payment should be made. This payment was made in full in June 2019 when the executors of the estate provided instructions on how the payment should proceed.

The two remaining Habitat payments have not been made as the participants had not provided their bank account details. One of these individuals is also due a Hen Harrier payment which has been delayed for the same reason.

The remaining Hen Harrier payment was delayed as the participant failed to provide updated bank details after closing an account. Payment was issued in May 2019 after new bank account details were provided. Situation as of June 16th 2019.

The total funds held by the Hen Harrier Project on June 16th 2019 in respect of the 2018 Habitat Payment was € 3,725.85 (2 participants).

The total funds held by the Hen Harrier Project on June 16th 2019 in respect of the 2018 Hen Harrier Payment is € 680.27 (one participant), this person is also one of the two who have not been paid the Habitat payment.

The total number of individual participants who were unpaid on June 16th is two.

Reviews & Appeals



There were 13 requests to the Project Manager for a formal review. Of these, 12 cases were at least partially upheld. The review requests were principally on issues connected with the submission of Habitat Assessments and the field assessments made by Project Officers.

No penalties were applied to farms in respect of habitat assessments made in 2018. This was a decision of the Steering Group based on the recommendation of the Project Manager.

Appeals of Disputed Decisions

An independent appeals process has been established. Peter Leonard will serve as an independent appeals Commissioner. He will hear appeals from participants who are dissatisfied with disputed decision following the outcome of a review process within the project. This was required as the Agricultural Appeals Office can only consider appeals against decisions made by an Officer of the Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

No cases were subsequently appealed to the Appeals Commissioner in respect of the 2018 payments.

Payment Process

In addition to the 12 cases where after a formal review a decision was made to issue a supplementary payment there were a further 27 cases where issues were identified by the Project Team. Supplementary payments were also issued to correct these. The total value of supplementary payments made to participants was € 21,272.63.

There was one case where an overpayment was made, this was refunded by the participant to the Hen Harrier Project. The amount involved was deducted from the next request for funds made to DAFM.

Annual Works Plans

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The specifications for Supporting actions were published in September 2018. Copies of these were issued to approved Hen Harrier Farm Advisors for distribution to their clients. Applications for Annual Works Plans are submitted through the GLAMS system operated by DAFM.

309 Annual Works Plans (AWP) have been submitted by HHP Advisors before the final closing date on February 14th 2019. The Hen Harrier Project developed a Rapid Assessment Tool for screening the possible impact of proposed Supporting Actions in relation to Environmental Impact Assessment, National Monuments and NATURA 2000 designated sites (Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation).

The approval of these applications has been slower than anticipated. Factors contributing to this include, slower than expected submission of applications by advisors, concerns about the legal requirements for Consent and I.T issues.

The delay in approving these Annual Works Plans will be taken into account. It is planned to pay for Approved Supporting Actions on certification by an approved Hen Harrier Farm Advisor or a Project Officer up to August 15th 2020.



The Supporting Actions guide was published on the 27th September 2018 and is available on our website.

Farmer Training

2019

Table 3: Farmer Training Dates & Venues (continued)

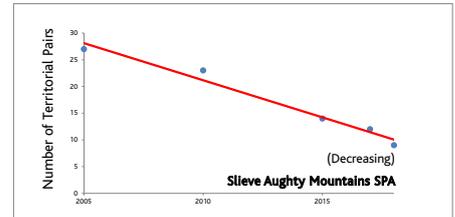
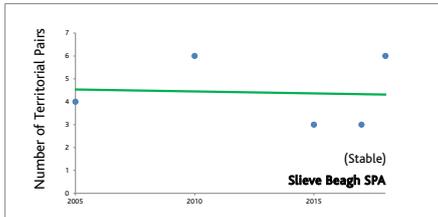
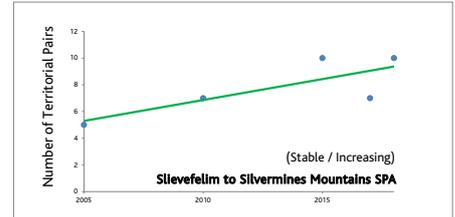
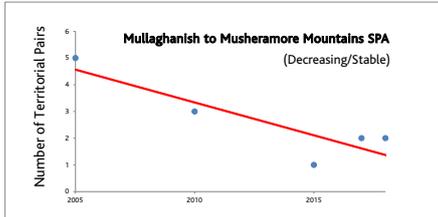
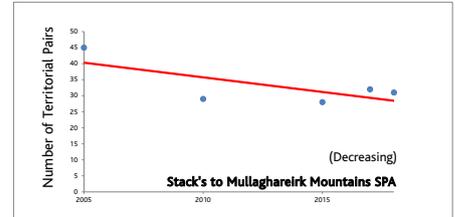
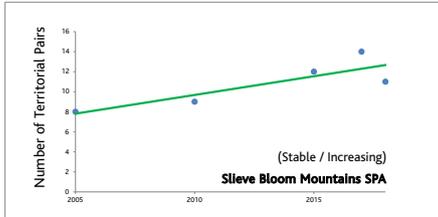
Venue	Special Protection Area	Date
Rearcross Hall	Slievefelim to Silvermines	13/03/2019
Cordal Community Centre	Stacks, Mullagherierks, Mount Eagle and West Limerick Hills	13/03/2019
Teagasc Office, Scarriff	Slieve Aughty Mountains	13/03/2019
Camross Community Hall	Slieve Blooms	14/03/2019
Lyreacrumpane Community Centre	Stacks, Mullagherierks, Mount Eagle and West Limerick Hills	14/03/2019
Egans Bar, Derrybrien	Slieve Aughty Mountains	14/03/2019
Ballydesmond	Stacks, Mullagherierks, Mount Eagle and West Limerick Hills	20/03/2019
Kilchreest GAA Grounds	Slieve Aughty Mountains	20/03/2019

Attendance

The Hen Harrier Project Officers delivered 31 farmer training meetings across the 6 SPAs over a period of 6 weeks from Mid February to end March 2019. Attendance at training was over 90%. In most SPAs there were multiple dates spread over a number of weeks. All training events were held in the evening from 6-9pm to facilitate participants with off farm employment. Table 4: Attendance at Farmer Training.

Special Protection Area	Number of Participants	Number who attended training	% who attended training
Slieve Bloom Mountains (4160)	45	43	96%
Stacks to Mullaghareirks, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle (4161)	266	232	87%
Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains (4162)	26	23	88%
Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains (4165)	68	64	94%
Slieve Beagh (4167)	20	17	85%
Slieve Aughty Mountains (4168)	203	185	91%
TOTAL	628	564	90%

Monitoring 2018



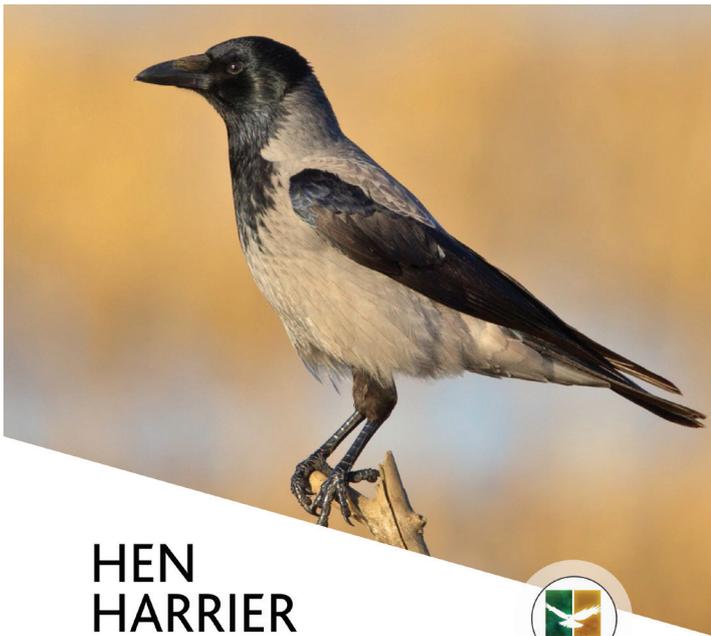
Co-operation with State Agencies

Data from the 2017 monitoring campaign was shared with the NPWS and the Forest Service for the purpose of updating the Red Zone maps used for guiding decisions on the issuing of licences for forestry related activity in the breeding Hen Harrier SPAs. This process was repeated in 2019 using the 2018 monitoring results. This annual updating of the Red zones provides the Forest Service with a more precise tool to inform the licensing of forestry operations.

Nest Protection



Developing a Strategy



HEN HARRIER PROGRAMME



NEST PROTECTION STRATEGY

A Nest Protection Method Statement was developed for the Programme to ensure activities follow all legal, welfare and wildlife guidance and adhere to best practice. The Nest Protection Officers contracted to the Programme operate under licence from National Parks & Wildlife Service and in accordance with an approved Nest Protection Method Statement.

Nest Protection within the SPAs as part of the legal predator management strategy has two key benefits (i) direct reduction of predation of Hen Harrier nests and nestlings to increase breeding productivity; and, (ii) indirectly can encourage biodiversity and help increase abundance and breeding success of other ground nesting birds which may provide food for Hen Harriers such as Red Grouse, Lapwing, Snipe, Meadow Pipit, Skylark and Curlew.

2018



Eight contracts were issued for nest protection in 2018 across five of the six SPAs. There was no Nest Protection Officer appointed in the Slievefelim to Silvermines SPA as there were no suitable applicants. Operations focused on reducing the predation pressures in these areas particularly during the weeks leading up to the fledging of Hen Harrier chicks. Losses at this late stage had been very high in 2017 and intervention was deemed necessary to improve fledging rates.

Nest Protection



2019

Eight contracts were issued for the control of Corvids in the Hen Harrier SPAs from February 15th to April 15th 2019. Following consultation with the Steering Committee a decision was made to replace the previous short-term contracts with a smaller number of longer-term rolling engagements. Four such contracts were issued in the Spring of 2019 along with one additional short-term contract issued as an interim measure pending an assessment of Nest Protection requirements in the Slieve Beagh SPA. The longer-term contracts were offered in the Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA, the Mullagherierks, Stacks, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle SPA and the Mullaganish to Musheramore SPAs.

Innovation



I.T Development

The Project Team in conjunction with our IT partners (Intuity Technologies) have developed a file sharing system using Sharepoint. This allows secure access to appropriate files by Project Staff and DAFM. A sub-site of this system acts as a support site for HHP advisors. It permits them to access material relevant to their individual clients including maps, farm plans etc in a secure and confidential manner. Advisors can also access reference material that will assist them in their work through the support site.

Working with Intuity, the Hen Harrier Project Team have developed the Dynamics database. This database was used for the collation of 2018 habitat data and for the calculation of payments. It is also used to give appropriate suggestions for management change to improve habitat scores. This gives the farmer and their advisor field specific management advice.

Working with Intuity we have also developed an App that will be used by advisors in the field to score fields and verify the delivery of supporting actions. The roll out of the App to Advisors commenced on May 28th, 2019.

The IT unit of DAFM further developed the GLAMS system to facilitate the production, approval and printing of Annual Works Plans. Procedures to transfer data from GLAMS to our database were developed in association with DAFM and INTUITY.

Our digital partners were shortlisted for the ITAG awards for Best Digital Project and Best New Talent for one of their staff who worked on its development.



Innovation

2018

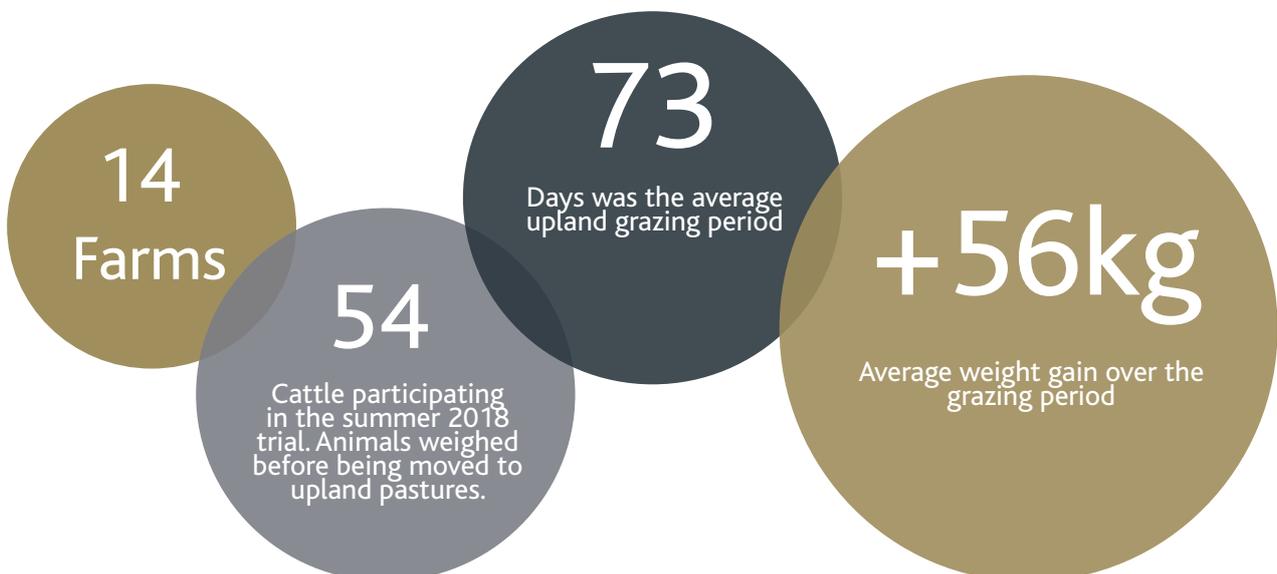


Tackling Nutritional Deficits in Upland Cattle Grazing

The Hen Harrier Project partnered with Dawn Meats and Devenish Nutrition to develop and demonstrate new techniques for tackling nutritional deficits in cattle grazing in the uplands and to give farmers tools for influencing animal behaviour and forage utilisation patterns. This approach is designed to;

- Manage wildfire risk by reducing excessive dominance of Purple Moor Grass (*Molinia caerulea*). Litter from this species is the principal fuel in Spring wildfires.
- Increase biodiversity by creating extra niches for other plant species as excessive dominance of Purple Moor Grass reduces.
- Increase Carbon sequestration potential by encouraging Sphagnum mosses through reduction in fire risk and competition with Purple Moor Grass.
- Reduce the risk to the stability of farm enterprises by ensuring continued eligibility for direct payment schemes.
- Optimise use of the grazing resource available on farms and minimise financial inputs by freeing up larger areas for silage production thus facilitating the production of winter forage with lower fertiliser inputs
- Demonstrate that cattle used to deliver ecosystem services in uplands can do so without a reduction in their value

There were 14 farms with 54 cattle participating in the summer 2018 trial. Animals were weighed three times; before being moved to upland peat sites, after the upland grazing period and again after a further month on improved grassland. The upland grazing period ranged from 54 to 84 days; the average period was 72.85 days.



Innovation (cont)

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The trial included Belgian Blues, Simmental, Charolais, Friesian, Aberdeen Angus and Hereford/Friesian crosses. Most of the animals involved were cull cows. Average weight gain was 56 Kg (9.8% of the initial weight) over the grazing period, the best performing animal was a Belgian Blue which put on 112 Kgs in 60 days, a daily weight gain of 1.87 Kg. Average daily weight gain was 0.76 Kgs per day. Interestingly there was very little additional weight gain during the month on improved grassland following the upland trial in spite of the supplementary feeding of concentrates.

Beef from animals participating in the trial was served at the 2018 Teagasc Agri-environment Conference held in Gort on October 25th 2018. The vast majority of delegates ordered the beef. It was also served at a debrief and dinner for participating farmers in Listowel the following month.

The trial is being repeated in 2019. Following on from experience gained in 2018 the weight of the feed blocks is being reduced from 25 Kg to 18 Kg and the design of the bucket is being improved by adding a handle to facilitate ease of use. There will be no change to the chemical or physical composition of the feed block itself. We are including a wider range of stock types with an emphasis on in-calf or with-calf suckler cows and on younger animals.



Wildfire Resilience

2019



During the Slieve Bloom fire, the Hen Harrier Project liaised with the incident commander and notified him of nest locations vulnerable to the fire or fire-fighting operations. The incident commander directed a helicopter water drop on to a fire front successfully protecting a Hen Harrier nest. Three chicks were fledged from this nest (60% of the total fledged in the Slieve Blooms). Overall Hen Harrier productivity in the Slieve Blooms was down considerably compared to the previous year. In 2018, 16 chicks were fledged, this fell to 5 in 2019. This represented a serious fall in what had previously been one of the most productive areas within the SPA network. A repeat of the 2018 fire would pose a serious risk to the Hen Harriers Projects objective to stabilise and if possible, to increase the Hen Harrier population.

The Project Manager attended the Wildfire 2018 Lessons Learned Seminar in the National Emergency Co-ordination centre on January 17th 2019. Following on from this the Hen Harrier Project and Laois Fire Service organised a meeting of stakeholders in the Slieve Blooms in Portlaoise on April 4th 2019. This meeting was attended by Laois and Offaly Fire Services, the Irish Farmers Association, Coillte, Bord na Mona, An Garda Siochana and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Forest Service were unable to attend but were supportive of the initiative. A decision to explore the potential for developing a fire resilience strategy for the Slieve Blooms was made. Development of this strategy¹ is currently being undertaken by the Hen Harrier Project.

This initiative is being taken to explore mechanisms for increasing landscape level resilience to wildfires. If successful, it could reduce the scale of future fires and facilitate the fires services in putting them out with minimal disturbance. This would deliver very significant benefits for biodiversity, reduce fire-fighting costs, protect direct payments and the value of forestry assets.

Note 1: The stakeholders who attended the initial meeting in Portlaoise visited the Eastern Mourne Project in Northern Ireland in June 2019. This visit was supported by the DAERA NI (Dept. of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland), the Northern Ireland Fire Service and the Mourne Heritage Trust.



Image © The Air Corp. Fire engulfs the Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA, July 2018.

Capacity Building



Ph.D Students

Naomi McMorrow was recruited as a Ph.D student for the Hen Harrier Programme funded Ph.D commencing in Autumn 2018. She started work on methods for assessing the value of public goods from High Nature Value farmlands and on the potential for synergies and conflict in the delivery of different ecosystem services in November 2018. This work is under the supervision of Dr James Moran, Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT), Dr. Caroline Sullivan Hen Harrier Project (HHP) and Dr. Marc Ruddock (Golden Eagle Trust Ltd).

A staff member is carrying out research for a Ph.D, they are being supported by the Hen Harrier Project through the provision of study leave and access to data.

Third Level Outreach

A Masters student in GMIT was assisted with the completion of her degree. The Hen Harrier Project introduced her to participating farmers so that she could develop her thesis on "Hill Farmers Perspectives on Ecosystem Services and Agro-biodiversity".

The Hen Harrier Project facilitated four 4th year students from NUIG with their final year projects. This work resulted in the first recorded presence of White Toothed Shrew west of the Shannon. They also noted an increased density of small rodents (an important food item for Hen Harrier) in fields with higher habitat scores relative to low scoring fields.

A student studying a film course in GMIT was also facilitated with her 4th year project.

The Hen Harrier Project also supported a 3rd year student from University College Cork with work experience as part of their degree. The Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine contributed to this student's training by facilitating them with a further two weeks work experience.

The Assistant Manager gave a guest lecture on the Hen Harrier Program to 4th year Environmental Science students in NUIG on January 12th 2019.

Local Actions

2019



This will provide support for actions that could not be delivered through an individual farm plan. € 80,000 budgeted for this round. This initiative is available to farmers either individually or in groups, community groups, small local businesses, schools and sports or social clubs serving the community in breeding Hen Harrier SPAs.

Applications must be under one or more of the following themes:

- Enhancing Biodiversity
- Agricultural Sustainability
- Education and Training
- Support for local food or craft producers

This opened for applications on March 19th 2019.

Decisions on the allocation of funding for this first round are expected in the summer of 2019.

Communication



- + The Assistant Manager Caroline Sullivan attended a HNV Link meeting in Tully, Co. Galway where a Portuguese delegation were briefed on the development of Results based Agri-Environment Programs.

- + Hen Harrier Project Staff attended the RBAPS Conference in Athlone on June 22nd 2018. The Project Manager Fergal Monaghan was a speaker at this event delivering a talk on the development of the Hen Harrier Project.

- + Fergal Monaghan attended the Launch of Droimeann Cattle Herd Book Fermoy on August 22nd 2018.

- + Fergal Monaghan & Eoin McCarthy participated at the Dawn Meats Open Day on their demonstration farm in Athenry, Co. Galway on September 5th 2018.

- + Fergal Monaghan briefed the EIP Agri Group about the progress of the Hen Harrier Project on September 6th 2018.

- + Hen Harrier Farm Advisor debriefing Seminars in Athlone October 3rd and Templeglantine October 4th 2018.

- + Evelyn Joyce attended the Irish Uplands Forum in Mulranny, Co. Mayo on October 4th/5th 2018.

- + Fergal Monaghan was an invited speaker at the Teagasc National Agri-Environment Conference held in Gort on October 25th 2018. Beef from the Summer grazing trial run by the Hen Harrier Project was served to Conference delegates.

- + The Hen Harrier Project organised a farm walk to a Hen Harrier Programme farm for attendees at the Burren Winterage School.

- + Project staff delivered presentations at two KT National events in Athlone and Claregalway.

- + Fergal Monaghan addressed an IFA meeting on the rollout of the Hen Harrier Program on November 2nd 2018 in Bunratty, Co. Clare.

Communication



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- + Eoin McCarthy spoke at the Listowel Food Festival November 8th-12th 2018.
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- + Caroline Sullivan attended a conference, "Rewarding the Delivery of Public Goods Conference", Edinburgh on November 28th/29th 2018.
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- + Caroline Sullivan was invited to address the Cross-Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy on "Why a focus on public funding for public groups" on November 29th 2018
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-
- + Fergal Monaghan briefed the EIP Advisory Group on two occasions on the progress of the Hen Harrier Project.
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- + Fergal Monaghan attended and spoke at the meeting on "2018 Wildfire Lessons Learned" meeting held in the National Emergency Co-ordination Centre on January 17th 2019.
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- + Fergal Monaghan spoke to a training event for DAFM inspectors in the Hodson Bay Hotel in Athlone on February 12th 2019.
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- + Caroline Sullivan chaired a session "Payment for Ecosystem Services" at the National Biodiversity Conference Dublin Castle on February 20th, 21st 2019.
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- + Ryan Wilson-Parr was a speaker at an International Conference on Hen Harrier held in Groningen University in the Netherlands, 20th & 21st March 2019.
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- + ITAG Awards ceremony March 29th 2019. Our digital partners were shortlisted for their work on the development of the Dynamics Database for the Hen Harrier Project.
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- + Fergal Monaghan was a speaker at the High-Level Conference in Bucharest on April 5th & 6th 2019. This event was organised as part of the Romanian presidency of the EU and was attended by senior political, research and administrative figures from EU member states, the EU Commission and the European Investment Bank. The Project Managers spoke about how the development of the Hen Harrier Project demonstrated the feasibility of delivering large scale results-based programs as part of a future CAP.
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Communication



+ Along with the Co. Laois Fire Service, the Hen Harrier Project jointly chaired a meeting of stakeholders from the Slieve Blooms on the development of a fire resilience strategy for the Slieve Blooms and improved cross sector operational co-operation in the event of a future fire. This meeting was held in Portlaoise Fire Station on April 9th 2019. The meeting was attended by Laois and Offaly Fire Services, the IFA, Coillte, NPWS and the Hen Harrier Project.

+ The Project Manager addressed the SCAR AKIS group on April 15th 2019 on the development and roll out of the Hen Harrier Program.

+ On the 17th April at Agriculture House, Kildare Street, Dublin, Minister Creed launched the publication and exhibition on Environmental Innovation Partnerships / Locally Led Environmental Schemes in Ireland. The Project Manager presented to delegates at the launch to showcase the innovation being undertaken in the Hen Harrier Programme.

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