

2021

Ballynahinch Castle Hotel Biodiversity Action Plan



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1.1 Ballynahinch Castle Hotel

Ballynahinch Castle Hotel is a luxury four-star hotel located on a 700-acre private estate of woodland, rivers and walks in the heart of Connemara Co. Galway. It is situated at the feet of the twelve bens mountain range, approximately 12 km east of Clifden and 10 km north of the fishing village of Roundstone. The Owenmore River flows in front of the hotel and is a renowned Salmon fishery which is fed by Ballynahinch Lake.

The site has a rich and storied history with a bronze age stone pair indicating that this was an important location even 4000 years ago. The famous pirate queen Grainne Mhaol who, in 1546 married Donal O'Flaherty, became resident here.

The present house at Ballynahinch was built by the Martin family, one of the tribes of Galway and Richard 'Humanity Dick' took up permanent residence here about 1813. Richard Martin was the M.P for Galway and in 1822 he introduced a bill the "Cruelty to Animals Act" which in turn led to formation of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

The property passed through several different hands before in 1946 the Tourist Board took possession and from there it remained a hotel into current times.

1.2 What is Biodiversity?

WWF defines Biodiversity in the following way:

Biodiversity is all the different kinds of life you'll find in one area—the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world. Each of these species and organisms work together in ecosystems, like an intricate web, to maintain balance and support life. Biodiversity supports everything in nature that we need to survive: food, clean water, medicine, and shelter.

1.3 Why is Biodiversity important?

Biodiversity supports life on earth and is an essential part of all our lives. We depend on biodiversity to provide clean air and water, healthy soils, food, building materials, and medicines.

From a Ballynahinch Castle perspective we are very proud of where we are from, Connemara is a stunningly rugged landscape located in Co. Galway on the west coast of Ireland. We actively promote our guests to engage in their surroundings by walking, cycling, fishing and hiking in our estate and surrounds, as such it is in our best interest that we actively maintain and improve our environment.



Estate Walking Map

1.4 What is a Biodiversity Action Plan?

A Biodiversity Action Plan is a strategic look at the biodiversity in the given area, in this case the grounds of Ballynahinch Castle Hotel, and puts in place a framework, wish lists and strategies to both preserve what is in place and where possible to enhance it.

This plan shall document the flora and fauna of our area as well as identifying what needs to be done, when it should be done by, and what is required to do to preserve and improve it.

2.0 Ballynahinch Castle's Biodiversity

Ballynahinch Castle Estate has a rich and varied habitat. Examples of protected species and some of the main wildlife found on the estate are outlined below.

2.1 Protected Species

The estate of Ballynahinch Castle Hotel is partly within the 'Connemara Bog Complex SAC' and one of the main river systems of this complex is the 'Owenmore River' which flows through the estate.

The Connemara Bog Complex SAC is a large site encompassing the majority of the south Connemara lowlands in Co. Galway. The site is bounded to the north by the Galway–Clifden road and stretches as far east as the Moycullen–Spiddal road. The site supports a wide range of habitats, including extensive tracts of western blanket bog, which form the core interest, as well as areas of heath, fen, woodlands, lakes, rivers and coastal habitats.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive

- Coastal Lagoons
- Reefs
- Oligotrophic Waters containing very few minerals
- Oligotrophic to Mesotrophic Standing Waters
- Dystrophic Lakes [3260] Floating River Vegetation
- Wet Heath
- Dry Heath
- Molinia Meadows
- Blanket Bogs (Active)*
- Transition Mires
- Rhynchosporion Vegetation
- Alkaline Fens
- Old Oak Woodlands
- Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*)
- Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*)
- Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

While not all these habitats and species are found within the estate of Ballynahinch, many are, as well as other important flora and fauna. One of the most important species in the history of Ballynahinch Castle is undoubtedly the Atlantic Salmon (*Salmo salar*).

2.2. Threats to Biodiversity

There are several different threats to biodiversity on a global and local scale such as development, pollution, habitat loss, global warming and invasive species.

Many of these while national and global issues can and are being dealt with closer to home with the implementation of our green hospitality initiative, which involves proper waste separation, waste reduction, energy conservation, recycling, renewable energy usage and managing and decreasing our carbon output.

Invasive species are a particular issue in Connemara and are something that we in Ballynahinch have been investing time and money in for many years now to reduce and in the long term remove from our estate. Some of the most notable invasive species include *Rhododendron ponticum*, *Gunnera tinctoria* (giant rhubarb) and *Fallopia japonica* (Japanese Knotweed). Most of these invasive plant species were first introduced to Ireland by Victorian plant hunters and since have become a menace due to their spreading and clumping nature which often prevents native plants from establishing and surviving. As there are no natural predators of these plants, as there would be in their native environments, it is up to us as custodians of the land to manage and prevent the spread of these species.

Other issues such as Ash dieback disease is something which we will continue to monitor and remove dead and heavily diseased trees to hopefully curtail the spread.



Japanese Knotweed



Rhododendron on avenue (2016)



Litter Collection

3.0 Ballynahinch Castle Hotel Biodiversity Plan

Below are the actions for the next few years and how we foresee them being implemented and the timeline we aim to achieve these goals. We will also discuss the rationale behind the actions we have chosen and how we see this benefitting the biodiversity of Ballynahinch Castle Hotel.

3.1. Rationale for Selecting Actions

As has already been mentioned Ballynahinch Castle is a renowned salmon fishery, we will endeavour to do anything within our powers to ensure a healthy Salmon population in the Ballynahinch Fishery.

Within our walled garden we have committed to growing fruit and vegetables for our hotel, without the use of pesticides or herbicides instead opting for organic practises. We have allotted a large part of the walled garden to a native wildflower meadow and we will continue to promote this and manage this using commonly accepted best practices. Within our grounds are garden we will continue to grow pollinator friendly flowers and shrubs and educate our guests to our policies.

In an effort to increase our 'green' spaces we will, where possible remove 'dead' spaces and instead add features such as green roofs to increase biodiversity.

3.2. The Actions

- We aim to eradicate invasive plant species such as Gunnera and Japanese Knotweed from our estate. This will take a few years of monitoring and removing but we should have achieved this goal by 2023
- We will continue and increase our efforts to remove invasive Rhododendron from our estate, this will be a timely and costly project. We aim to have achieved our goal by 2026
- Install green roofs on available surfaces. To be achieved by 2023.
- Increase our pollinator friendly planting schemes and increase habitat for these pollinators. Continuous.
- Investigate the possibility of installing beehives, 2022
- Engage with local community to encourage green initiatives 2023
- Continue to run regular litter picks in our area. Ongoing
- Replant forestry with native woodland removing non native conifers. 2025
- We are in the process of undertaking a complete review into the fishery here at Ballynahinch. We will then be working on the actions from that report over the next 5 years to promote and improve the Salmon stocks in our waterways. 2026