

MAYO MAKES A 'BEELINE' TO SAVE THE GREAT YELLOW!

Having signed up to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan under a framework agreement, Mayo County Council is now involved in a research project to save the Great Yellow Bumblebee, as the local authority formalises its long-term commitment to conserve pollinators in the county.

The Great Yellow bumblebee is the rarest in Ireland. Currently it can only be found in any numbers on the Mullet Peninsula in North Mayo, having formerly been widespread across the island of Ireland. And now Mayo County Council, in partnership with Belmullet Tidy Towns, the National Biodiversity Data Centre and UCD, aims to ensure that this bumblebee has a future.

According to Peter Gill, Mayo County Council's Parks Superintendent: "We all depend on pollinators and the important service they provide. Unfortunately, our pollinators are in decline. Of the

99 different types of bees on the island of Ireland, nearly a third are threatened with extinction. The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan is a strategy that addresses this problem.



The Great Yellow is a large blonde bumblebee with a black stripe and has a characteristically low buzz in comparison to some other species.

"An important part of the plan is to research and collect data to inform pollinator conservation. There are some particular research gaps around some of our rarer pollinators, and what we need to do to conserve them."

BUMBLEBEE RESEARCH

Mayo County Council is currently involved in an important research project on the Great Yellow Bumblebee.

Niamh Phelan, an MSc student in Wildlife Conservation and Management at UCD, has been carrying out research on this bumblebee and its general ecology on the peninsula, under the supervision of Dr Dara Stanley. Niamh has liaised closely with Belmullet Tidy Towns, Mayo County Council and the National Biodiversity Data Centre during her research.

Potential reasons for the decline of the Great Yellow are attributed to the intensification of agriculture, and the fact that it is a late-emerging species while its long tongue has created a specialised food preference. There have been no published

studies to date in Ireland on the Great Yellow, and little is known about its ecology in an Irish situation.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to investigate the habitats the Great Yellow prefers on the Mullet Peninsula, as well as what plants it favours to obtain a better understanding of the species in Ireland. Preliminary results suggest this species is only found in species-rich grassland habitats with a diversity of flowers, and is frequently found foraging on red clover and common knapweed.

Combined with data from Dave Suddaby, BirdWatch Ireland, who walks a bumblebee monitoring scheme transect on some of their reserves frequented by the Great Yellow bumblebee, this data will help build up a picture of the requirements of this rare bumblebee to help inform conservation measures in the future.

Limited data describing the distribution of a species can lead to misinformed decisions with regard to management, and the misuse of resources leading to the potential failure of a conservation programme.

For the conservation of rare species, it is crucial to examine how habitat fragmentation and ecological barriers affect connectivity between populations. Future studies on the Great Yellow should include a full habitat study of the Mullet Peninsula to determine the area needed to support population growth of this species.

The Ballycroy area of County Mayo contains machair, which could potentially support a population of the Great Yellow. Future studies should expand outside of the Mullet area to survey other potential suitable areas.

To conserve this species, it needs a succession of forage throughout its yearly cycle and nearby suitable nesting sites. The creation of an agri-environment scheme for farmers, based on the results of this study, to support and create suitable habitats, both forage and nesting areas, is crucial.



The framework agreement was signed on 'Mayo Day' (4 May) by the then Cathaoirleach Cllr Blackie Gavin and Chief Executive Peter Hynes.