

MEET SINEAD MC DONNELL, ONE OF IRELAND'S LOCAL AUTHORITY BIODIVERSITY OFFICERS!



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WHY SHALL MUNICIPALITIES DEAL WITH BIODIVERSITY?

Rockstrom et al. (2009) identified nine so-called planetary boundaries (beyond which anthropogenic change will put the Earth system outside a safe operating space for humanity). Biodiversity loss is the single boundary where current extinction rates put the Earth system furthest outside the safe operating space.

Biodiversity is the incredible variety of organisms that work together in ecosystems, to maintain balance and support life. Ecosystems are biological communities of interacting organisms and their physical environment. Biodiversity supports everything in nature essential to survive: food, clean water, medicine, clothes, climate and economic growth. According to the World Bank, over half of the global GDP is directly dependent on nature.

Biodiversity loss is a decrease in biodiversity within a species, an ecosystem, a given geographic area, or Earth as a whole. It is well known that due to many humankind-driven threads, biodiversity loss is dramatic. According to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment Report, up to one million species are threatened with extinction, many within decades.

Decision-makers have finally understood that the different elements of the ecological crisis, as the most pressing issue facing humanity today, have to be tackled together if we are to advance the Sustainable Development Goals and secure a viable future on this planet. United Nations calls it the triple planetary crisis, having pollution as the third factor besides climate change and biodiversity loss, but actually, degradation of soil is also a global threat.

Urban biodiversity as a category refers to the variety of living organisms as well as the multiplicity of habitats in and around dense human settlements. The conservation work to mitigate biodiversity loss is more or less the same in the city and outside of urban areas, however, some sub-themes such as awareness-raising, mitigating the heat-island effects and other urban disaster risks, green infrastructure and the fight against invasive species make the urban aspects important within biodiversity conservation. The most important thing is that cities offer unique opportunities for learning and education about a resilient and sustainable future and have a large potential to boost innovations and governance tools.

THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BIODIVERSITY OFFICER PROGRAMME

In Ireland, in collaboration with the Heritage Council and supported by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 26 Local Authority Biodiversity Officers started the work at the beginning of 2024 (in some cases the position is funded entirely by the relevant City or County Council). This number is based on the official [website](#), however the aim is to have Biodiversity Officers in all local authorities.

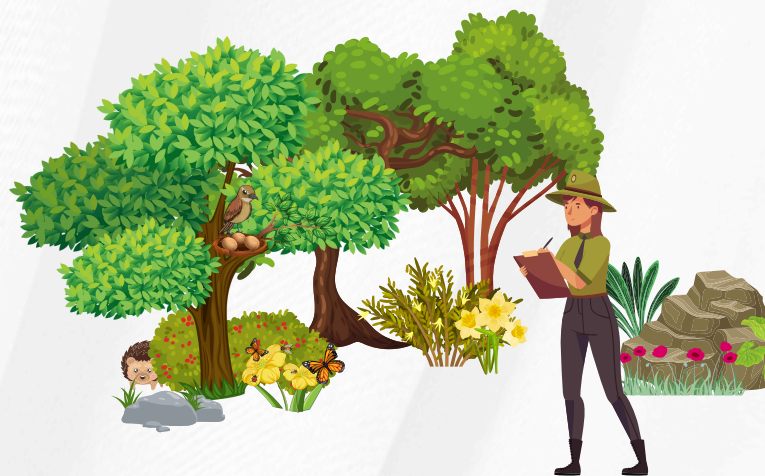
One of the newly appointed Biodiversity Officers is Ms Sinead Mc Donnell, who works for Limerick City and County Council. The BiodiverCity partnership met her online on 30 May 2024 during the BiodiverCity Café session 5 as well as in person during the Core Network Meeting 3 on 12-13 June 2024 in Limerick.

Biodiversity Officers are employed by local authorities and work at the city and county levels, collecting data on biodiversity, carrying out conservation projects, developing policies, providing advice and information and raising awareness.

Biodiversity officers work closely with heritage officers and other professionals within the local authority, as well as with the wider community in each city and county. Their role is diverse and defined by individual local authority preferences but with a core focus on strategic planning and collaboration. Their responsibilities include:

- Creation of a Local Biodiversity Forum
- Writing a Local Biodiversity Plan
- Research, surveys and data collection
- Providing advice on biodiversity for local authority staff
- Community engagement and raising awareness
- Development of strategies, policies, and projects relating to wildlife, habitats and biodiversity
- Provision of biodiversity expertise to groups such as the Heritage Forum or the Climate Action Team

The breadth of these responsibilities highlights the pivotal role that biodiversity officers play in promoting awareness, knowledge and appreciation of local biodiversity through their work. Check out further [info](#) and a promotion [video](#) about the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme!





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PROFILE OF A BIODIVERSITY OFFICER

Profiles of the selected Biodiversity Officers vary from case to case, but having a profound experience in conservation work is a must. Sinead for example had “lots of odd jobs and work experience and volunteering along the way”. Among others, she has experience in environmental conservation and countryside management as well as environmental education, and she used to work as a Branch Liaison Officer at Bird Watch Ireland and as an Environment Awareness Officer at Limerick City and County Council.

Her work related to collaboration with different local players includes (examples selected by taking into consideration the transfer potential of activities for other BiodiverCity partner cities):

- Irish Catholic Bishops: 30 % of church grounds return to nature by 2030. 12 Limerick Parishes are forming a networking group to make progress. This is a great initiative which can be easily followed by other partners.
- She successfully applied for funding to produce the Limerick Biodiversity Action Plan and for different biodiversity projects.
- She contributed to the annual Tidy Towns Seminar focused on wetlands and wetland birds.
- She organised lots of local events like the Bat & Moth Walk with Albert Nolan, listening to the Dawn Chorus, Biodiversity Talks with biologist Éanna Ní Lamhna, Guided Walk with Geoff Hunt, online talks on Invasive Species with Colette O’Flynn for local authorities and Tidy Town Groups, and many citizen science events.
- She has a collaboration with Limerick Libraries to build capacities, place new books, and promote events.
- She contributed to a training for managing hedgerows.
- She supports local organisations that build capacity for biodiversity.
- Managing the Limerick City Swift Nest Box Project.
- She records sightings and encourages others to record.
- Organisation of engagement and sensitisation projects like Sound Mapping, Pyramid of Life or Meet a Tree



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HERITAGE COUNCIL GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

The Heritage Council has published Guidelines for Local Biodiversity Action Plans as a resource for Local Authorities in developing and implementing their biodiversity strategies.

These guidelines provide a robust framework for creating comprehensive, effective, and sustainable action plans that integrate biodiversity considerations across all local authority functions. The Heritage Council Guidelines cover essential aspects such as stakeholder engagement, biodiversity auditing, setting objectives, and monitoring progress. By following these guidelines, Local Authorities can ensure that their action plans are thorough, well-informed, and aligned with best practices in biodiversity conservation.

It is worth checking this guideline as BiodiverCity partner cities shall also draft an Integrated Action Plan focusing on entirely or partly on biodiversity.



Nature is a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.

LAUDATO SI', 9, 12

