



2025 - A Year in Review

2025 has been a busy and rewarding year for Inishowen Rivers Trust, working with schools, communities, farmers, agencies and volunteers to raise awareness and protect the rivers and wildlife of Inishowen.

IRT Grand Tour 2025

In November, the team at Inishowen Rivers Trust took part in a 'Grand Tour' to learn from other river and catchment groups around Ireland. Read on to hear more about what our colleagues throughout Ireland are doing in their own areas.

Local Enhancement Programme 2025

With support from the Local Enhancement Programme 2025, Inishowen Rivers Trust delivered hands-on River Bingo workshops and community talks across Inishowen, helping people of all ages better understand water quality in our local waterways.

Citizen Science in 2025

Citizen science was a key part of our work in 2025, with schools, volunteers and community members recording local wildlife and river observations through the National Biodiversity Data Centre portal, helping build a clearer picture of biodiversity across Inishowen.

1. 2025 - A Year in Review

2. IRT Grand Tour 2025 - Learning, Connecting and Sharing Across Ireland

3. Local Enhancement Programme 2025

4. Citizen Science in 2025: Building Local Knowledge Together

5. Hare's Corner: Applications open January

6. Green Guardians 2025

7. Water Quality: The Challenges and the Good News

8. A Word From Our Chair

2025 - A Year in Review

2025 has been a busy and rewarding year for Inishowen Rivers Trust. Throughout the year, we worked with schools, communities, farmers, volunteers and partner organisations to help people learn about their local rivers and to protect the waterways and wildlife that make Inishowen so special.



This year also saw our team grow. We were delighted to welcome John Doherty and Micheala Gallagher to the IRT team.

One of the highlights of the year was the Green Guardians Biodiversity Training Programme. These events brought people together to learn about soil health, insects, birds, marine life and the connections between land and water. The programme included workshops at Clonmany Community Garden, river and nature sessions across Inishowen, and a memorable boat trip to Inishtrahull where we saw puffins, seals, dolphins and even a sunfish. Participants also learned how to use the National Biodiversity Data Centre portal to record wildlife, helping to build a better picture of local biodiversity.

Our River Bingo workshops, funded by the Local Enhancement Programme, were another highlight. We visited schools around Inishowen to help pupils spot river insects, understand river health and explore their local habitats. One class even found a young trout during the workshop. These sessions helped build confidence and interest in nature among children and teachers alike.



We continued our work with farmers through the Farming for Water EIP, sharing practical ways to improve water quality, manage runoff and protect riverbanks. Healthy soil, good water management and small changes on farms all contribute to cleaner rivers, and we saw great engagement from local farmers this year.

Throughout 2025, we collaborated with many partners and community groups, including Donegal County Council, LAWPRO, The Mill River Conservation Group, BirdWatch Ireland, Nature North West, KPM Soils, Boomtree Bees, Green Sod Ireland, local schools, community centres and the IPAS community. Their support and involvement helped make our events possible and kept momentum strong across all our projects.

We also continued to expand our Knowledge Repository, adding new resources to help people learn about rivers, biodiversity, invasive species, natural flood management and citizen science. Behind the scenes, our volunteers helped at events, supported workshops and contributed their time and enthusiasm whenever needed.



IRT Grand Tour 2025 – Learning, Connecting and Sharing Across Ireland

In November 2025, the Inishowen Rivers Trust set off on a four-day Grand Tour around Ireland to meet other Rivers Trusts, community groups and environmental organisations who, like us, are working to protect and restore their local waters. Supported by LAWPRO through the Catchment Support Fund 2025, the trip gave our team and friends a chance to learn, share experiences and bring home new ideas for the future.



Day 1 – Ballybay Wetlands & ORCCA

We began our journey on 20th November with a visit to Ballybay Wetlands in Co. Monaghan. There, Alan Kilpatrick from Enterprising Monaghan guided us through the wetland site, explaining how it is managed as both a natural habitat and a community recreational space. We also learned about Wild Clan, a local group using the surrounding woodland to teach children outdoor skills and deepen their connection with nature. The centre is also home to a Waldorf school, making it a real hub of education and community engagement.

Our next stop was a farm participating in an EIP project led by ORCCA (Oriental River Catchments and Coastal Association). Their LAWPRO-funded Project Officer, Liam Woods, introduced us to dairy farmer Seamus Conroy and his son James. They recently opened up a culverted stream on their land to improve fish passage—an excellent example of how farmers can help enhance river habitats. By removing this barrier, fish can now migrate freely upstream, benefiting the entire watercourse.

Day 2 – Ward River Valley, East Wicklow Rivers Trust & Ballinglen River

Day 2 began early at Ward River Valley Park, Swords, where we met Sean Good from Rivas Ecological Engineering. This site has seen major improvements, from tackling invasive cherry laurel to addressing a fish barrier and restoring the historic mill complex. The careful planning and engineering work here is a credit to everyone involved.

We then travelled to Wicklow, where Faith Wilson of the East Wicklow Rivers Trust brought us through their gully woodland site, followed by a visit to Laragh to see work being carried out with the local Tidy Towns group and where we were joined by Christine Reidy from the Maigue Rivers Trust in Limerick.

The final stop was the Ballinglen River, where modifications designed and built by Rivas have successfully alleviated a fish passage barrier. The results are already proving positive, showing what can be achieved through collaboration and practical restoration work.

We rounded off the day with dinner and great conversation with Ann Newton (EWRT trustee), Sybrin Oggel (Maigue Rivers Trust trustee) and Hannah O’Kelly, Biodiversity Officer with Wicklow County Council.



Day 3 – IRD Duhallow & Shannon Town Community Wetlands

On Day 3, we travelled to Newmarket, Co. Cork, to meet staff at IRD Duhallow, a community-led rural development organisation with over 30 years of experience. Aiden Suart, their Agricultural Community Animator for the Farming for Water EIP, gave us an overview of the range of environmental and agricultural actions underway. Their collaborative approach to working with farmers and communities, protecting water quality and restoring habitats, was truly inspiring.

Later that afternoon, we visited the Shannon Town Community Wetlands, where Olive Carey, Andy Horgan, John O’Brien, Seán Ó Nuanáin and Tony Walsh showed us their impressive wetland restoration project. Their work has transformed the site into a thriving natural habitat, supporting native plants, insects and wildlife.

We were also brought to another of their heritage projects—the restoration of a historic cottage linked to British General Cuthbert Lucas, who was captured by the IRA during the War of Independence. This was a fascinating insight into the local history and the community’s dedication to protecting it.



Day 4 – Lough Corrib & Sligo Bay Catchment Rivers Trust



Our final day took us to Lough Corrib, where we met with Jennifer Cunningham, Micheál Ó Cinneide and Ignatius Egan from Corrib Beo. They gave us a tour of the lake and shared the story of their work to protect the Corrib catchment. Their focus on conservation, community engagement and safeguarding cultural heritage left a strong impression.

We ended the tour with a visit to the Sligo Bay Catchment Rivers Trust, meeting Fidelma Flynn, Sheena Spencer, Alan Spencer and Patrick Benson. They shared their plans for future projects and their hopes for increasing community involvement in protecting local rivers and waterways.



A Tour Full of Learning and Inspiration

Across four days and hundreds of miles, we met incredible people who are leading the way in river restoration, community action and biodiversity protection. We learned from their challenges, celebrated their successes and built new connections that will help strengthen our work here in Inishowen.

A huge thank you to everyone who welcomed us so warmly and shared their knowledge and to LAWPRO for supporting this valuable opportunity. We returned home inspired, energised and full of ideas for the year ahead.



Local Enhancement Programme 2025 What It Delivered

The Local Enhancement Programme (LEP) 2025 funded by Donegal County Council, allowed our team to deliver a series of River Bingo workshops across Inishowen. With this support, we visited schools and community groups in Culdaff, Clonmany, Quigley's Point, Gleneely, Bunrana and Desertegney, helping pupils learn how to assess river health by looking for insects, checking riverbanks and observing water conditions. A memorable moment came at Whitecastle, where Thomas Lawrence from the Mill River Conservation Group, spotted several young wild trout in the river as he was taking a sample.

LEP funding also supported two Healthy Rivers, Healthy Communities sessions for adults in St Mary's Hall Burt and the Plaza Bunrana, giving people a practical introduction to river health and local water issues.

This programme helped us reach a wide range of people, build awareness of river habitats, look at how to access river health and strengthen our local partnerships. LEP 2025 made it possible for us to bring simple, hands-on river education directly into the community.



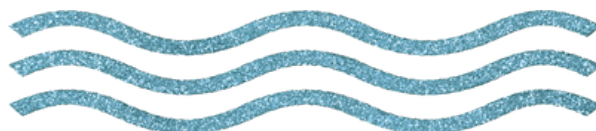
Call to Action

Become a Citizen Scientist

Start recording your wildlife sightings on the National Biodiversity Data Centre portal, every record helps us build a clearer picture of Inishowen's natural heritage.

You can get started at:

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/>



INISHOWEN RIVERS TRUST DONORS



Thank You

As a charity, we rely entirely on funding and donations. This year, we are grateful to Inish Pharmacy for their continued generosity in choosing Inishowen Rivers Trust as their chosen charity partner. These funds are invaluable, enabling us to invest in education and organise events.



Citizen Science in 2025: Building Local Knowledge Together

Citizen science continued to be an important part of our work in 2025, helping us build a clearer picture of the wildlife and river health across Inishowen.

By involving schools, volunteers and community members, we were able to gather useful observations while also helping people learn how to identify species and understand their local environment.



Throughout the year, we encouraged people to record what they saw using the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) portal. During our Green Guardians Biodiversity Training Programme, participants learned how to use the portal and logged sightings of insects, plants, birds and marine life.

This included records from the Inishtrahull boat trip, soil and insect workshops, bird sessions and coastal walks.

Our River Bingo workshops also introduced children to the idea of citizen science. Pupils learned how certain insects can indicate good water quality and how their findings can feed into local knowledge about river health. Even simple observations, like seeing a young trout, spotting stonefly or mayfly help build awareness and understanding.

Funding from the Heritage Council enabled us to develop a handy pocket sized leaflet with guidance on how community members can submit their own wildlife records at home, on walks or during events. These records add to the national database and help track changes in species, habitats and seasonal activity.



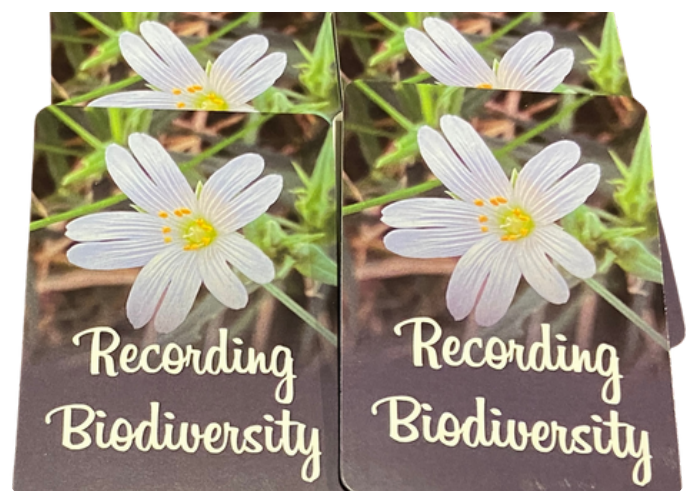
By taking part in citizen science, people across Inishowen helped support better environmental information and stronger community involvement.

This year showed us that small contributions from individuals can build valuable data over time.

As we move into 2026, we plan to continue promoting citizen science and to encourage even more local people to record and share their wildlife sightings.

We encourage everyone to record their wildlife sightings on the National Biodiversity Data Centre's Citizen Science Portal. Every record, whether it's a bird in your garden, a plant on a walk, or an insect by the river, helps build a better picture of Ireland's biodiversity.

It only takes a minute to log a sighting, and your contribution supports conservation work locally and nationally. You can get started at: <https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/>



Hare's Corner - Applications open in January



The Hare's Corner is a biodiversity initiative created by the BurrenBeo Trust, a landscape charity based in the Burren region. Its purpose is simple - to help landowners make more space for nature through small, practical, high-impact actions.

This initiative was launched in 2021 in Co. Clare and due to its proven success and demand has expanded to several other counties, and is growing year on year. Every new action taken by The Hare's Corner participants is documented and mapped.



There are a number of different actions you can take on including creating a pond, planting a heritage orchard, planting a native woodland and making a plan for nature to promote wildlife such as pollinators. Inishowen Rivers Trust is delighted to collaborate with The Hare's Corner and Julie Corry, Biodiversity Officer for Donegal CoCo to act as advisors for the initiative for 2026. Our staff members John and Micheala have a wide range of experience and will help support landowners, homeowners, school groups, and community groups to take on these actions to help combat biodiversity loss and climate change.



The Hare's Corner is open to a wide range of groups but it should be noted that farmers in the ACRES scheme or those with NPWS Farm Plans are not eligible as these schemes already offer similar actions.

Applications are open from Jan 1st - 18th so start planning! More information and eligibility criteria can be found here <https://thehairescorner.ie/>



Landowners, homeowners, community groups, schools:
Do you want to do something meaningful for nature, climate and biodiversity?

Apply now for support to create one or more of the following on your site:

- Mini-Woodland - Free native trees and advice
- Mini-orchard - Free heritage apple trees and advice
- Pond - Free advisor visit and construction costs
- 'Plan for Nature' - Free ecologist visit and advice



Visit www.thehairescorner.ie for information and to apply
Applications open from 1st - 18th January 2026



NPWS



The Hare's Corner is coordinated by Burrenbeo Trust in partnership with Donegal County Council Biodiversity Office, and funded by LBAF (supported by NPWS).

burrenbeo trust
connecting people and place

Green Guardians 2025: What We Learned This Year

Green Guardians was a major part of our work in 2025, bringing people together throughout the summer to learn more about the nature on their doorstep. Running from July to September, the programme covered a wide mix of topics including soil health, insects, birds, marine life and the links between land, water and the wider environment. Each session focused on keeping things practical, clear and enjoyable.

One of the most unforgettable moments happened during our session with Boomtree Bees. As the group was learning about pollinators and how hives work, a wild bee swarm suddenly arrived and moved into an empty hive on site. It was a rare sight to witness first-hand, and it left everyone buzzing for the rest of the day.



Another standout experience was the Marine Marvels boat trip to Inishtrahull. We set off from Bunagee Pier and were treated to sightings of puffins, seals, gannets, shags, cormorants and even a sunfish. Just when we thought the day was winding down, a pod of dolphins appeared and followed the boat, a perfect ending to an already memorable trip.

Our workshop at Clonmany Community Garden gave participants the chance to learn about soil structure, nutrients and the hidden mycelial networks beneath our feet. Other sessions focused on identifying insects and birds, helping people understand how these species link back to the health of rivers, coasts and habitats.

This year's Green Guardians brought together a wide range of people, families, individuals, people new to Inishowen and members of the IPAS community. Many were attending a biodiversity event for the first time, and the relaxed, hands-on approach made it easy for everyone to take part.



Throughout the programme, we encouraged people to get involved in citizen science by recording what they saw using the National Biodiversity Data Centre portal. Quite a few participants made their first wildlife records during the sessions, contributing valuable information to Ireland's national biodiversity database.

Green Guardians 2025 showed how much interest there is in learning about nature when the information is made accessible and enjoyable. We're grateful to everyone who joined us, and we look forward to building on this success in 2026.



Water Quality: The Challenges and the Good News

Recent EPA water quality reports show that many of Ireland's rivers are under pressure. Fewer rivers are now classed as being in good condition, with pollution from nutrients, wastewater, failing septic tanks and increased runoff during heavy rainfall continuing to impact water quality.

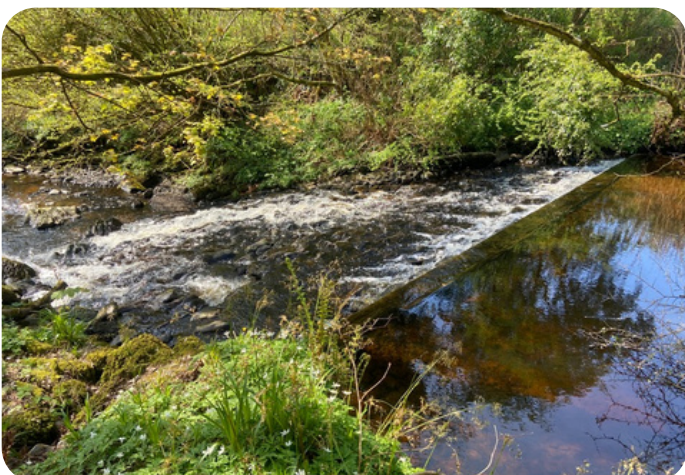
One worrying trend highlighted by the EPA is the increase in fish kills. These events are often linked to pollution incidents or low oxygen levels and can cause serious, long-lasting damage to river ecosystems.

Sewage treatment also remains a challenge. While some wastewater plants have been upgraded, others still struggle during periods of heavy rain, and poorly maintained septic tanks in rural areas can add to the problem.

The Good News

There are positive signs. Awareness of water quality issues is growing, farmer-led and community-based approaches are helping reduce pollution, and local monitoring and citizen science are improving our understanding of what's happening on the ground. Importantly, rivers can recover when pressures are reduced.

Protecting our waters is a shared responsibility, and while the challenges are real, the commitment across communities to care for rivers is stronger than ever.



We would like to sincerely thank all of our funders, donors and partners for their continued support of Inishowen Rivers Trust in 2025. Your funding, expertise and collaboration make our work possible.

In particular, we thank LAWPRO, the Heritage Council, Donegal County Council, Creative Ireland, Farming For Water EIP, and the Local Enhancement Programme (LEP) for their vital support. Thanks also to our valued partners KPM Soils, Green Sod Ireland, Big Green Art, IDP, Citizen Assembly North West, Coastwatch, Mill River Conservation Group, Butterlope Farm, Cara Brady, The Loughs Agency, Nature North West, Boomtree Bees, Deelee Anglers, Rivus Ecological Engineering and BirdWatch Ireland.

Working together, we are able to protect our rivers, support biodiversity and engage communities across Inishowen.



An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir, Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland Programme



Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

A Word from Our Chair

Winter is a quieter season along our rivers, but it is no less important. Beneath cold, clear waters, fish rest in deep pools, conserving energy until spring. Spawning gravels hold the promise of the next generation and the riparian trees continue their vital work, holding riverbanks stable, slowing flows and protecting water quality even in their bare winter form!

As we pass the winter solstice and the shortest day, the light begins its slow return. Our rivers reflect this rhythm well: a season of stillness on the surface, but steady work beneath. As Seamus Heaney reminds us, "The river's tongue is a wet silence" and in winter, that silence speaks volumes about the health of our catchments. Fallen leaves feed aquatic life, floodplains reconnect, flows reshape channels and well-managed buffer zones protect water quality when it matters most.



This year has been a busy and rewarding one for Inishowen Rivers Trust. We have continued to work with communities, landowners and partners across the peninsula to keep our waterways, aquatic creatures, wildlife and habitats at the heart of everything we do.



We were delighted to welcome two new members to our team: John Doherty, our Farming for Water Community Animator, who is already building strong connections with fellow farmers, and Michaela Gallagher, Project Officer supported by LAWPRO's Catchment Support Fund, whose youthful energy and organisation have been a real asset to the Trust.



As 2025 draws to a close, winter offers a timely reminder of the value of rest, reflection and renewal. While much of the work continues quietly behind the scenes, this season gives us space to take stock and to look ahead with purpose. Hopefully the returning light will bring renewed energy to our shared work for Inishowen's rivers and coastal areas.

On behalf of the Board and staff, I would like to wish all of our supporters, volunteers, partners and communities a peaceful Yule, Happy Christmas and a healthy New Year.

