

BALLYBUNION NATURE GROUP

- **Background**

One of the early aims of the Wild About Life programme was to inspire greater awareness and appreciation of local biodiversity among the collaborators. A key objective was to extend this enthusiasm into the wider community by establishing a local Nature Group in Ballybunion.

The creation of the Ballybunion Nature Group represents one of the key outcomes of the Brilliant Ballybunion initiative, encouraging community involvement in protecting, exploring, and celebrating the area's rich natural environment. Through activities, events, and citizen-led projects, the group aims to connect people with nature, promote biodiversity, and support sustainable practices that benefit both wildlife and the community. By engaging the community in meaningful action, the Ballybunion Nature Group contributes to a more sustainable and resilient future, ensuring that the natural beauty and ecological richness of Ballybunion can be enjoyed for generations to come.

- **What has happened so far**

A significant milestone was the "Wild and Wonderful" panel held as part of the Brilliant Ballybunion North Kerry Sustainability Day at the Tinteán Theatre in February 2025. During this event, attendees were invited to express their interest in becoming involved in the formation of a local Nature Group. The response was highly encouraging, with 16 expressions of interest received on the day.

Building on this momentum, Brilliant Ballybunion organised the first meeting of the Ballybunion Nature Group on Friday, 21st March. The meeting was widely promoted through the organisation's mailing list, website, and social media channels, as well as through Ballybunion News and local notices in the Kerryman, Kerry's Eye, and North Kerry Advertiser.

The event drew an excellent turnout, with 25 participants in attendance. During the session, attendees were invited to share their feedback and ideas on what they would like the Nature Group to focus on, helping to shape the group's early direction and priorities.

Photo from the Kerry's Eye:



Following the initial meeting, a WhatsApp group was established on 24th March to facilitate communication and collaboration among interested participants. The group was organised into several themed categories based on public interest, including Ringed Plover, Ballybunion Bean Festival, Carder Bee, and Small Blue Butterfly.

A steering committee was subsequently formed to guide the group's development. This committee comprises representatives from the Brilliant Ballybunion team (Grainne Toomey, Joanne O'Brien, and Rena Blake), programme collaborators (Aine Hellard, George Nolan, and Sean Culhane), and interested community members (Sarah Nolan and Barry O'Donoghue).

Strong partnerships have also been established with key organisations such as Kerry County Council, LAWPRO (Local Authority Waters Programme), National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS), the Kerry Branch of the Irish Wildlife Trust and the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG). Representatives from these organisations are invited to meetings and actively participate in discussions through the WhatsApp group, providing valuable expertise and support.

The Ringed Plover subgroup achieved notable progress during the 2025 breeding season, with members actively engaging in daily monitoring and surveys along the North Kerry coastline. This collaborative effort not only enhanced local understanding of the species' behaviour and breeding patterns but also helped to raise awareness of the threats faced by Ringed Plovers and the importance of ongoing conservation action. On August 10th, 2025, The Ringed Plover project was featured on a radio show called *Ours to Protect*, with Radio Kerry, which received great feedback from the community.

<https://ourstoprotect.ie/radio-kerry-august-broadcast-1-protecting-the-ringed-plover/>

On 10th October, a public meeting was held at the Convent to invite further participation in the Ballybunion Nature Group and to reflect on progress made to date. The meeting focused on several key themes, reviewing the Ringed Plover Project, participation in Coastwatch, planning activities for 2026, and developing ideas for winter talks and workshops. A total of 15 participants attended in person, with 17 additional apologies received. Minutes of the meeting were circulated to all interested parties, and the feedback received has been incorporated into the group's ongoing plans.

On 24th October, the Ballybunion Nature Group hosted the first in its winter Lecture Series. This inaugural event was held in memory of Manchán Magan and featured a presentation by Rob Fell on *Irish Words for Nature*. The lecture was well attended, with 30 participants, many of whom expressed interest in joining the group's WhatsApp community and mailing list. The group has now grown to include 71 members on WhatsApp and 52 on the mailing list, reflecting the growing community interest in local biodiversity and conservation.

A number of members have also begun collaborating with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) through the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS), coordinated by BirdWatch Ireland, conducted locally by NPWS ranger Seán O'Brien. These monthly surveys are ongoing

in Ireland since 1994, and are a great opportunity for the Nature Group members to develop their identification and recording skills.

To further promote its activities and encourage wider community engagement, the Ballybunion Nature Group has taken out a page subscription in the weekly e-zine Ballybunion News. Regular updates, including photographs and articles on recent projects, are shared to highlight the group's ongoing work and invite new members to get involved.

- **Outcomes/Expected outcomes**

Outcomes to Date

- Increased community engagement: Over 70 individuals are now active in the Ballybunion Nature Group WhatsApp community, with more than 50 subscribed to the mailing list, reflecting strong and growing public interest in local biodiversity and environmental action.
- Successful collaborative projects: The Ringed Plover monitoring initiative and participation in the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) have deepened local knowledge of wildlife populations and contributed valuable data to national biodiversity databases.
- Enhanced partnerships: Productive working relationships have been established with Kerry County Council, NPWS, LAWPRO, IWT and IWDG, ensuring professional guidance and support for local projects.
- Community awareness: Regular features in *Ballybunion News* and public events such as the Winter Lecture Series have raised awareness of biodiversity, conservation challenges, and the importance of climate resilience.
- Capacity building: Members have developed new skills in wildlife monitoring, citizen science, event organisation, and community outreach, strengthening local environmental leadership.

Expected Outcomes

- Improved local biodiversity protection: Continued monitoring and awareness campaigns will support conservation measures for coastal and wetland species and habitats.
- Expanded education and outreach: Ongoing talks, workshops, and citizen science activities will increase understanding of climate change impacts and promote sustainable practices across the community.
- Strengthened environmental resilience: Collaboration with partner organisations will inform habitat management and nature-based solutions to help Ballybunion adapt to coastal and climate challenges.
- Sustained community participation: The Nature Group will continue to grow as a hub for environmental engagement, encouraging residents and visitors alike to take part in protecting Ballybunion's natural heritage.
- The Ballybunion Nature Group will play a central role in implementing the actions of the **Ballybunion Community Biodiversity Action Plan (CBAP)**, ensuring the long-term

conservation of Ballybunion's natural heritage and strengthening community engagement with the environment.