

EIP-AGRI Mulkear Lesser Horseshoe Bat Conservation Project

CAP funds help farmers build habitat features to protect an endangered bat species in Ireland

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Mulkear River, Limerick, Ireland

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P4 – Ecosystems management

Focus Area: Biodiversity restoration, preservation & enhancement

Measures: M16 – Cooperation

Funding: RDP Support – 166 749 (EUR)

Timeframe: 2021 to 2023

Project promoter: Vincent Wildlife Trust

Email: katemcaney@vwt.org.uk

Website: www.vincentwildlife.ie

Summary

The lesser horseshoe bat population in Ireland is small, approximately 13 000 bats, and is confined to six western counties. Fragmentation of the Irish landscape has created gaps in the distribution of this bat species that has given rise to genetic differentiation within the population. Several thousand horseshoe bats are recorded in Counties Clare and Kerry, but there are areas that contain few colonies, one of which is Limerick. A lack of suitable roosts is believed to be the reason for this. A partnership between Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) and the Mulkear River Catchment EIP-AGRI project obtained funding in 2021 for habitat works constructing new roosts on farms in east Limerick.

Project results

During 2022, VWT monitored bat activity on each farm and the lesser horseshoe bat was detected at three of the six locations.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The participating farmers set aside productive agriculture land for biodiversity. This demonstrates a change in mindset amongst farming enterprises in Ireland and the CAP schemes are advocating this policy.



© F. Greenaway

- A contingency figure of 10% had been included in the original budget. This, however, was insufficient because of the rise in the cost of raw materials before construction had begun. The number of bat houses was therefore reduced from ten to six so that the project stayed within budget.

Context

The Mulkear EIP-AGRI Lesser Horseshoe Bat Conservation Project set out to build new and permanent habitat structures in County Limerick in the vicinity of the Mulkear River, to function as roosting sites for the lesser horseshoe bat.

The fragmentation of the Irish landscape that has occurred due to changes in landscape use has created gaps in the distribution of the lesser horseshoe bat, with clusters occurring in counties Clare and Kerry. There are, however, large areas from Mayo to Cork, one of which is Limerick, that contain few or no colonies. One action to address this fragmentation is the provision of new roosts.

The project was undertaken in an area of east Limerick associated with the Mulkear River Catchment. This area was chosen because



vegetated rivers are potential corridors for movement in the landscape by this species. Also, the small population of lesser horseshoe bats in Limerick is a critical link between the larger populations in neighbouring Kerry and Clare.

Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT: www.vincentwildlife.ie) and the EIP-AGRI Operational Group of the Mulkear River Catchment (www.mulkeareip.com) undertook this conservation project for the lesser horseshoe bat under the European Innovation Partnerships Initiative 'Farming and Community Biodiversity Initiative' Competitive Call for Proposals that was advertised in February 2021.

Objectives

The main aim of this project was to assist farmers to provide new and permanent roosts for the lesser horseshoe bat on ten farms within the catchment area of the Mulkear River in County Limerick. It also aimed to provide a range of educational and promotional material about this species for the farming community and rural dwellers.

Activities

The project activities involved:

- Six block and slate structures were built on farmland – four by professional builders on behalf of farmers and two built by farmers (self-builds).
- Plans were drawn up by an architect in liaison with VWT.
- A quantity surveyor supervised construction.
- Locations were assessed and passed by the statutory nature conservation body – National Parks and Wildlife Services – prior to construction.
- Planning exemptions were obtained from the local planning authority prior to construction.
- Forty-one farm visits were made by VWT during the 20 months of the project.
- Information packs were given to each farmer containing a satellite image showing the location agreed for their bat house, the aspect of its roof necessary to ensure maximum solar gain and the area that would require fencing post-construction.
- Each farmer was provided with salvaged natural slate as the roofing material, a roll of 1F Bitumastic felt to lay under the slates and from which bats can safely hang, two Tilt Trays to install at the bat openings to prevent predators accessing the building, an external bat box for vesper bats (that crawl into roosts) and two external bee bricks to provide solitary pollinators with nest sites.



© Bit-Media

- Two Knowledge Transfer meetings were conducted with the farmers during the project.
- Project progress was recorded using video and drone footage, which was used to produce a short promotional video midway through the project and a longer educational video when the project was completed. These videos are available on the websites of both partners.
- A leaflet entitled 'Actions for lesser horseshoe bats on farms' was produced and launched in April 2023.
- An oral presentation about the project was delivered by VWT at the 10th Irish Bat Conference in March 2023.
- The bat houses will be monitored during 2023 using passive temperature loggers and detectors and results posted on partner websites.

Main results

During 2022, VWT monitored bat activity on each farm and the lesser horseshoe bat was detected at three of the six locations.



Key lessons and recommendations

- The participating farmers set aside productive agriculture land for biodiversity. This demonstrates a change in mindset amongst farming enterprises in Ireland. The current CAP schemes are advocating this policy but this project secured farmers buy-in by approaching them at the outset of the project and clearly explaining the declining population of the lesser horseshoe bat, the critical role they could play in assisting its conservation and how actions by them on their farms would make a difference.
- During the initial meetings with the selected farmers, their preference was to undertake the building work themselves. When, however, they received the architect drawings and information provided by a quantity surveyor, four of the farmers elected to engage a professional builder. This approach had not been anticipated but resulted in these houses being built within a shorter timeframe than when farmers undertook the work. Due to all parties following the plans and with on-site support from the quantity surveyor, all the houses were built to a high standard.
- A contingency figure of 10% had been included in the original budget. This, however, was insufficient because of the rise in the cost of raw materials before construction had begun. The number of bat houses was therefore reduced from ten to six so that the project stayed within budget.

“When I was first asked, I wasn’t sure if this was for me but I have a young daughter who is mad into the environment and I’m up for doing things for the environment so I’m delighted to have been part of the project. The plans were all laid out so it was straightforward to build.”

PJ O’Malley (participating farmer)

Additional information:

 vimeo.com/bitmediairl/review/782945620/100f471355



© Bit-Media



Funded by
the European Union