Irish Uplands Forum
Fórum Cnoch na hÉireann

Promoting sustainable management of the Uplands
Ag spreagadh forbairt inmharthana at na hArd Tailte
www.irishuplandsforum.org

WHO CARES FOR THE UPLANDS

newsletter

December 2025

The Irish Upland Forum (IUF) is a voluntary body established in 1995, whose members include farmers, community activists, recreational users, ecologists, tourism and other countryside service providers who represent those who live, work or recreate in the Irish Uplands. Our primary focus is a partnership approach to sustainable upland management and to support upland community groups to address local challenges. The IUF's vision is to advocate a collective voice for the sustainable management of uplands, providing advocacy and informed support to groups to build a vibrant network of upland communities and places. To join our partnership (individuals / groups welcome), contact Rea at membership@irishuplandsforum.org

IUF WEBINAR SERIES 2025-2026

The Irish Uplands Forum's latest Webinar Series runs from October 2025 until February 2026. The webinars which took place this year included

- **'Gríosach: Fire, Tradition and Art in the Irish Uplands'** by the artist Shane Finan, FIRECULT on 7th October
- **'Old Irish Goat in the Irish Uplands'** by Sean Carolan on Tuesday 4th November
- **'Climate Action Louisburgh'** by Richard Mannion Tuesday 2nd December

Recordings of the above talks can be found on https://irishuplandsforum.org/archive/events-archive/

Next #4 in the series will by Marina Conway, Head of Woodlands at Hometree, talking about Woodlands and Plantations in the Uplands, at 7pm, 13th January 2026. Join this webinar: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86226555110.

Our last in the series #5 is by Caroline Crowley and Sarah Prosser - Bioregionalism and Uplands - 7pm, Tue 3th February 2026 (TBC)

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In this issue you will also find:

- **Article and some photos of our Networking Event in Connemara, Galway, on 22nd and 23rd October** (photo below)
- **CAFRE & Teagasc Uplands Symposium 2nd -3rd September 2025**
- **Summary of the IUF's submission to Our Rural Future**

Irish Uplands Forum hosted a national networking event on 'Building Partnership for Farming, Nature and Recreation in the Uplands' in Connemara on 22-23rd October 2025

Right: Irish Uplands Forum's Chairperson, Frank Nugent, gave the opening address at Letterfrack, 23 October 2025

In October 2025, the Irish Uplands Forum (IUF) hosted a successful national Networking Event in Connemara on the theme of building partnerships to promote the sustainability of farming, conservation and restoration of nature, and permissive access to recreation in Ireland's Uplands. Since its foundation in 1995, the IUF has worked to build alliances to address the future of Ireland's uplands. Our upland communities and landscapes are under increasing economic, social and environmental pressures and, to survive, must become an active part of the national conversation.

During summer 2025, the IUF surveyed our stakeholders across Ireland to identify strategies to address the future sustainability of our Uplands in the context of the Nature Restoration Plan and the challenges in adapting to climate change. To advance this conversation, IUF organised two aligned networking events in Clifden and Letterfrack in Connemara in October, to share knowledge and experience among farming, community, nature and policy alliances.

The evening workshop on 22/10, commenced with a presentation of the results of the IUF Survey by Dr. Caroline Crowley. Then a lively workshop of more than 40 participants, facilitated by members of Mountaineering Ireland, examined 5 themes that had been identified in the research, including Partnership for the Future; Agri-Policy for the Uplands; Planning for Nature Restoration; Tourism & Recreation; and Uplands in the National Conversation, respectively.

On 23 October, an all-day networking event was held at the Connemara West Centre in Letterfrack, where invited speakers from across the island of Ireland addressed issues of policy, farming, climate, landscape management, biodiversity, heritage and outdoor recreation. Speakers were invited to share strategies and practical actions with almost 100 participants, to address the requirements and opportunities of the Nature Restoration Plan and climate action, including:

Upland Ecosystems and Integrated Land Management: *Policy to Practice*

ACRES Breifne- *Agri-Environment approaches to Land Management*

Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE Project – *restorative management of western SACs*

Recreation in Ireland's Upland Areas – *Looking to the Future***Hill farming: meeting the Challenges**– *view from a Mayo hill farmer's perspective*

Landscape Northern Ireland: *Enriched Landscapes, Enriched Lives*?

Impacts of Climate Change on Flora and Habitats of Ireland's Uplands

Preserving the Past - Protecting the Future *The Farming Rathcroghan archaeology model*

Ireland's Nature Restoration Plan – *what could it mean for our Uplands?*

Enhancing Biodiversity on the Hills*: The CAFRE Glenwherry Journey, Co Antrim*

The **EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL)** requires that all member states must prepare a national Nature Restoration Plan (NRP) by September 2026, to ensure that 20% of EU lands and seas are in ecologically good condition by 2030, followed by 'all ecosystems in need of restoration' by 2050. These include *inter alia* uplands, forests, agri-systems, rivers and urban green spaces. Two principles underpin the NRL, including 'continuous improvement' and 'no deterioration', so that progress in achieving healthy environments is measured, monitored and maintained once established. An IUF representative takes part in a national Leaders' Forum, convened by NPWS, that is feeding into the development of the NRP at a senior level.

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Irish Uplands Forum National Networking Event *'Building Partnership for Farming, Nature and Recreation in the Uplands'* 22-23 October 2025 Continued

Dr Derek McLoughlin, Programme Manager, Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE (left) Mike McClure (Landscapes NI) and Teresa O'Hare (Mourne Heritage Trust) (right) at IUF networking event, Letterfrack, Co Galway, 23/10/2025

All presentations and audience discussions were noted and will inform the development of IUF's next strategic plan in 2026. Speakers' presentations are presented in full on IUF's website:

https://irishuplandsforum.org/events/building-partnerships-for-nature-farming-and-recreation/

Full proceedings of the event are under preparation and will be shared in due course. Overall, the networking event was a major success and we thank all who attended for their participation.

Deirdre Lewis, Secretary - Irish Uplands Forum
October 2025

Below left and right: Connemara Uplands

Our Rural Future 2026-2031

IUF Submission

The Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Dara Calleary TD, launched a public consultation to further inform development of the next iteration of Ireland's Rural Development Policy, ***Our Rural Future 2026-2031.***
In December, the IUF made a submission to this Consultation Paper. This submission was prepared by Frank Nugent IUF Chair; Deidre Lewis IUF Secretary, and Prof. Jim Walsh, former IUF Board member. The main points made in this submission included the following:

- ◊ The need to recognise the unique landscapes and communities of the Uplands, as per Gaeltacht communities.
- ◊ The need to align the objectives and delivery of sectoral policies pertaining to rural development.
- ◊ The recognition of the ecosystems services provided by Upland farmers to society - water storage, carbon sequestration in upland peats, outdoor recreation and biodiversity enhancement.
- ◊ Need to support extensive, traditional Uplands farming systems, young farmers and the transition to diversification.
- ◊ Uplands are critical in meeting our national commitments in climate adaptation and nature restoration - engagement with the people who farm and live in the Uplands is central to this.

The full IUF submission to Our Rural Future can be found through our website—https://irishuplandsforum.org/activities/planning-for-the-future-2/

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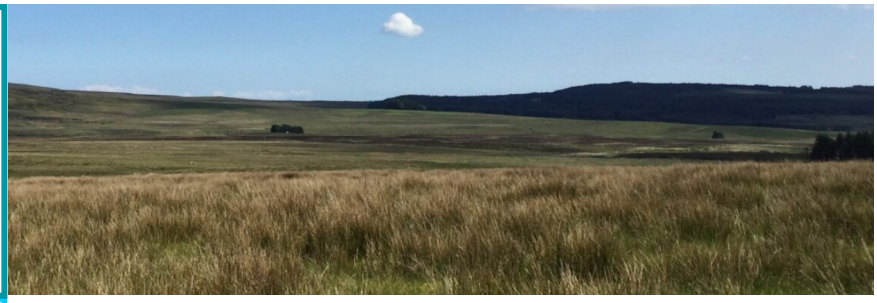
CAFRE & Teagasc Uplands Symposium

2nd-3rd September 2025
Glenwherry Hill Farm
Co Antrim



Irish Uplands Forum attended the third joint Teagasc and CAFRE* Uplands Livestock and Habitat Management Symposium, held this year in early September in Co. Antrim. A total of 195 delegates, including representatives from farming, research and industry attended from North and South.

Glenwherry Hill Farm provides a demonstration platform for farmer education and knowledge transfer programmes, to help deliver profitable, sustainable enterprises. In Northern Ireland, over 10,000 farms are located on 'severely disadvantaged' lands, and where almost a quarter of NI land type is classified as peat. The CAFRE Farm Centres are actively working to deliver carbon reduction, enhancement of water quality, and replenishment of soils and habitats. Efficient, productive livestock and land management are key to helping deliver this.

Albert Johnston, Head of Knowledge Advisory Service at CAFRE, remarked in his welcome that CAFRE is keen to transfer knowledge on how uplands can contribute to the delivery of ecosystem services for wider society. DAERA** Deputy Secretary, Martin McKendry noted the important role of upland agriculture in carbon sequestration and biodiversity management, as well as food production. The CAFRE / Teagasc partnership is working to help upland farmers deliver on these outcomes, through various initiatives in both organisations.

Dr Catherine Keena, Countryside Management Specialist with Teagasc, gave a comprehensive overview of the range of Irish Upland programmes led by **Teagasc.** The introduction of the BETTER Farm Sheep Programme aims to advance sheep farming in business, environment and technology applications through training, education and research. Professor Davy McCracken from Scotland's Rural University College (SRUC) shared experiences of a model hill farm in Scotland. He noted that changing weather conditions are impacting on land use and reducing bird populations across the Highlands. Remote collection of data, through GPS monitoring of sheep grazing behaviour, and gathering metrics from peatland characteristics, are being used to inform better management of habitats, carbon sequestration and flood alleviation.

Dr Sanjeev Dasari of Ulster University provided a summary of detailed research on upland peatland carbon emissions. Interestingly, recent results demonstrate that part of the Creeve Moor in Glenwherry is sequestering rather than emitting carbon, despite being worked previously. He noted that this may be due to the coefficient factor applied (established in lowland England) in the mathematical calculations, where the CF may not be suitable for upland peat soils. However, he clearly highlighted the need for further research in carbon accounting of peatlands across the island of Ireland.

Dr Declan O'Mahony from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), as a member of the Glenwherry Hill Regeneration Partnership Project Board, presented results of habitat mapping and condition data from the Glenwherry Hill Farm. He noted that 960 hectares of the farm are comprised of five main habitat types and ten subtypes, offering diverse habitats to over 70 plant species.

Day 2, CAFRE Hill Farm Centre: Irish Uplands Forum exhibited at the Farm Centre as part of the joint Teagasc -CAFRE Uplands Open Day. There we met other exhibitors, *inter alia,* the Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE team; the Woodlands Trust NI, and the Dairy Council of NI who are modelling the economics of various farm sizes and key actions to reduce environmental impact while increasing economic benefits to farmers.

On Day 2, CAFRE organised guided field trips to the Glenwherry Hill Farm, their model farm in the Glens of Antrim, stopping at four locations along the route to hear from a range of expert speakers.

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CAFRE & Teagasc Uplands Symposium Continued

Here we heard from CAFRE* staff on applied research into optimal sheep stocking rates and carrying capacity on upland farms; optimal breeding and peri-natal ewe and lamb management; and pilot research into efficacy of out-wintering systems. Additionally, research is carried out on peatland management; carbon accounting of upland soils and drainage waters; and measurement of groundwater, using dip wells to monitor the natural hydrological conditions of wetlands. Practical habitat management is delivered through virtual fencing to support conservation; moorland rewetting and rush cutting, as well as creation of scrapes and bog flush dams to support breeding waders. Over almost 20 years, management of rats, hooded crow, fox and mink have allowed ground-nesting bird numbers to increase, where Glenwherry is now home to the largest breeding curlew population on the island of Ireland. Additionally, outwintering of stock in lower meadows allows wetlands to provide ideal nesting conditions for the birds in Spring.

The CAFRE Hill Farm presents a model representation of upland environments and has a tremendous potential to further inform sustainable farming, upland management, habitat recovery and nature conservation. We left the symposium wondering why we do not have a similarly managed hill farm in the Republic of Ireland to provide longitudinal research on optimisation of hill farming for farmers, nature and climate adaptation.

Full details of Sustainable Uplands Livestock and Habitat Management Symposium can be accessed at: CAFRE & Teagasc Uplands Open Day - CAFRE

Rea Lavelle and Deirdre Lewis Sept 2025

* CAFRE College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise

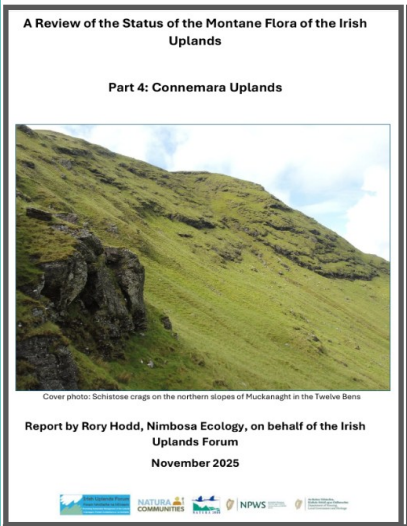
**DAERA Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

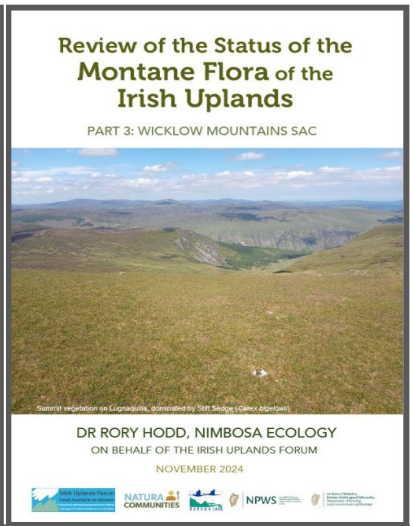
Review of the Status of the Montane Flora of the Irish Uplands

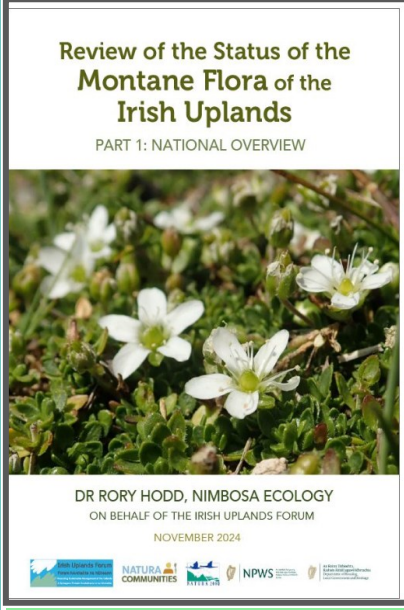
Dr Rory Hodd has completed his fourth report on rare plant species in the in the Irish Uplands—Connemara Uplands.

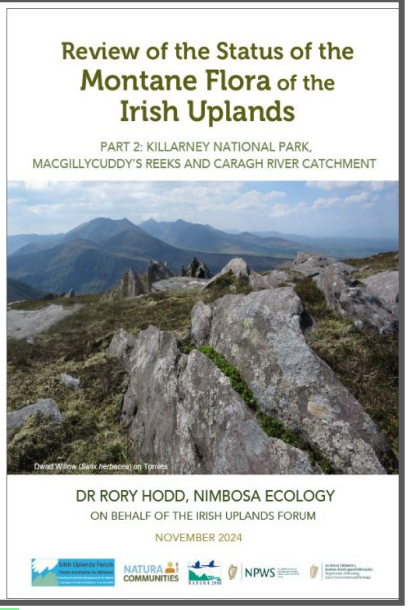
A Review of the Status of the Montane Flora of the Irish Uplands Part 4. ***Connemara Uplands,*** is now available on our website through https://irishuplandsforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Montane-Flora-report-4.-Connemara.pdf .

Dr. Hodd's research (including previous reports also available on our website: National Overview; Killarney National Park and Wicklow Mountains SAC), was commissioned by the Irish Uplands Forum and funded through the NPWS Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme (PCES).









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