



**THEME:**

Environment

**FUNDING (ERDF+MATCH):**

€9,230,313.93

**MATCH FUNDING:**

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs; and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

**LEAD PARTNER:**

Newry, Mourne & Down District Council

**PROJECT PARTNERS:**

East Border Region Ltd; Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute; Ulster University; Ulster Wildlife; Monaghan County Council; Institute of Technology Sligo; Golden Eagle Trust; Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust; and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Start Date: 01/01/2017

End Date: 31/12/2021

**PROJECT CONTACT:**

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 @theCANNproject

## SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES BODY

### Project Case Study: Collaborative Action for the Natura Network (CANN) - Harriers in the hills and hollow places

During 2020 significant efforts were made by the project to collect field data despite Covid-19 restrictions, that had called a halt to spring surveys from late March to late May. The project put in place stringent risk assessment and mitigation measures and all landowners' permissions were revisited to ensure that project representatives could access the sites safely and make up for lost time. The monitoring team of Golden Eagle Trust staff and volunteers worked all hours to complete surveys wherever possible. Hen Harrier were recorded breeding and/or wintering within and around several of the lowland CANN sites.

During winter and into early spring, the area around Moneygal Bog hosted hen harriers roosting in the bog, in scrub and *juncus* dominated pasture areas. A small number of foraging flights were recorded on the site during the summer as birds nesting across the border in Donegal quartered the wetland looking for the small mammals and passerines that make up much of their diet. Sadly, the Donegal pair did not fledge any young.

Late winter surveys at Garry Bog identified over wintering hen harriers in rushy areas around the site where they like to roost. However, there were no breeding birds and the nearest known pair were in the Antrim Hill SPA and the 20km is perhaps too long a flight for summer foraging. Peatlands Park painted a similar picture with neither wintering nor breeding harriers present, but there are some nice developing reed-bed systems that could be highly beneficial for winter roosting hen harriers in the future. Hen harriers, along with an occasional marsh harrier, are known to frequent winter roost sites near Peatlands Park around Lough Neagh.

Photo:  
*Hen Harrier in flight*  
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It is felt that Cranny Bog is probably too small with restricted habitats to provide space and food for breeding or foraging, and the surrounding houses and more intensively managed farm land may dissuade winter roosting birds. Tully Bog is also probably too small, and the birds were not recorded there either in 2020, although they are known in the wider area. Fairywater Bog complex has many neighbouring winter roost sites for Hen Harriers, some of which were occupied during the winter season with the bog providing winter refugia, although high numbers of foxes may have reduced optimal roosting sites by predation. No breeding or foraging birds were recorded in 2020.

A similar tale is told at Ballynahone and Curran Bogs, although there are known breeding sites less than 10km away around the Glenshane Pass, the improved farmland between the uplands and the bogs perhaps acts as a habitat barrier for movements of the species. The rate of nest failure around Sliabh Beagh SPAs during 2020 was higher than expected for these Special Protection Areas (SPAs) but some notable disturbances with off-road motorbikes, unleashed dogs and heavy machinery activity across a range of locations which may have caused displacement or disturbance of some pairs of harriers. In the projects upland sites there was however some success, although on smaller scale than the record-breaking season in 2019. This year 3-4 pairs of Hen Harriers bred, fledging 7 young and wintering on the lower slopes and valleys around Cuilcagh and 7-10 pairs across Sliabh Beagh SPAs (north and south) only fledged a disappointing five young in total. All the Cuilcagh breeding pairs were recorded nesting outside the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and were found in second rotation non-native conifer plantation, but once fledged the birds far preferred the open moorland to hunt and overwintered within the designated sites.



Photo: Fledging Hen Harrier,  
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