



# Raptor LIFE

## ANNEX I\* BIRD SPECIES

### The **Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus*

is a bird species of high conservation concern. It is listed in Annex I of the EU Birds Directive. The male Hen Harrier has silver-blue upperparts and is white underneath with broad black tips to the wings. The female is larger than the male and has a soft brown plumage with contrasting patterns under the wings and a white rump just above the tail. When pairs form, they chose their location very carefully. Hen Harriers in Ireland will typically nest in heather bogs, young forestry, scrub and mountain glens. The female lays her eggs in the warm, soft nest which she and the male have carefully built on the ground, made of grass, twigs and heather. Duhallow is an important stronghold for Hen Harrier in Ireland.



### The **Merlin** *Falco columbarius*

is another of Ireland's endangered raptors. It is Ireland's smallest raptor, and flies low at high speeds with great agility. Its high-speed attacks allow it to sometimes catch prey larger than itself. The female is larger than the male and has brownish plumage, whilst the male's upper body plumage is grey-blue. It breeds in upland areas and moves down to the lowlands in winter. Its numbers increase in the winter due to the migrating birds from Iceland availing of Ireland's milder winter. Very little is known about Merlin in Duhallow, or indeed in Ireland.



## OTHER RAPTORS FOUND IN DUHALLOW

### **Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

The Kestrel is Ireland's most commonly seen raptor species. It is often seen hovering along large roadways, seeking out prey that might be hiding in the vegetation. Although this species is widespread and commonly seen, its population is declining. This may reflect a wider deterioration in our environment.



### **Barn Owl** *Tyto alba*

The Barn Owl is an iconic bird of prey in Duhallow. A nocturnal predator, it hunts for mice, rats and bank voles at night. Its preferred habitat is farmland where its prey can be found along hedgerows and open fields. It is one of the most threatened owl species in Ireland, its decline mainly due to habitat loss, accidental poisoning and road fatalities.



### **Long-eared Owl**

*Asio otus*

The Long-eared Owl is distinguishable from other owls due to its large ear tufts on top of its head. It lives in woods, copses and coniferous plantations, close to open grassland where it hunts mice, rats, shrews etc. The characteristics of the Duhallow region make the area particularly suitable for owls.

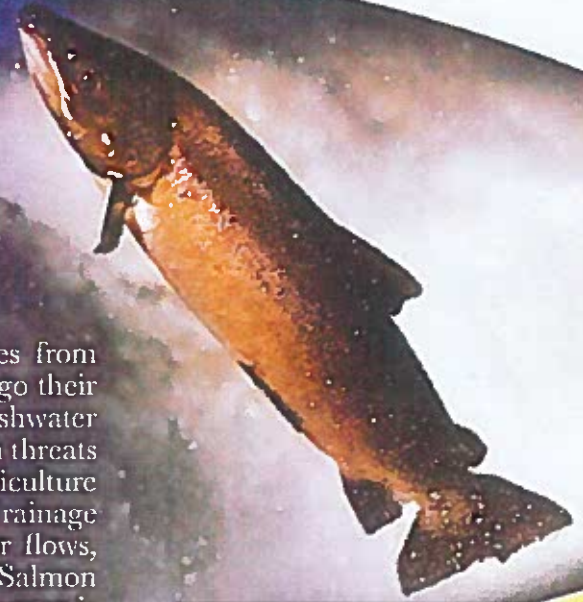




## ANNEX II\* FISH SPECIES

### Atlantic Salmon *Salmo salar*

Most Atlantic salmon are anadromous, travelling long distances from spawning rivers to their feeding grounds at sea. At sea they undergo their greatest feeding and growth, returning as adults to spawn in natal freshwater streams and rivers (from November to December in Ireland). Main threats to Salmon include: Nutrient enrichment (e.g. domestic sewage, agriculture and forestry runoff), water pollution from the road network, land drainage and changes in landscape hydrology leading to changes in river flows, excessive riverbank erosion and siltation of spawning grounds. Salmon require clean, silt-free gravel beds for spawning. The River Blackwater is one of Ireland's most important salmon rivers.



### Brook Lamprey *Lampetra planeri*

The Brook lamprey is the smallest of three lamprey species in Ireland (the other two are the River lamprey *Lampetra fluviatilis* and Sea lamprey *Petromyzon marinus*) and is the most widespread in Duhallow. The lamprey is an eel-shaped, prehistoric fish with a sucker-like mouth instead of jaws. The Brook lamprey, unlike other lamprey species does not go to sea and does not parasitize other fish. It has an unusual juvenile phase for fish, where it lives burrowed within the riverbed and feeds on detritus for 3 to 5 years. It was once thought that the ammocoete (juvenile) was a different species because of its rudimentary eyes and fins. The ammocoete undergoes metamorphosis into an adult, emerges, and spawns in fine river gravel.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Sean Rooney.



Natura 2000 is the centrepiece of EU Nature and Biodiversity policy. It is an EU wide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 Habitats Directive. The aim of the network is to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. It is comprised of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated by Member States under the EU Habitats Directive and also incorporates Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which are designated under the 1979 Birds Directive. The EU LIFE programme is a financial instrument to assist EU member states in the conservation of Natura 2000 sites.

## SOME OF THE RAPTORLIFE PROJECT'S ON-THE-GROUND ACTIONS

### Creation of a wildlife corridor

A buffer strip of up to 80m in width will be created along the course of the upper Blackwater for a distance of over 3km. This will provide improved foraging and possibly nesting habitat for Merlin and Hen Harrier and will connect the upland SPA to the SAC.



### Invasive species control

Invasive species, including Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, Rhododendron, and conifer species will be controlled in the SPA and SAC. Infestations along the road network (vector route) will also be addressed.



### Protection of Riverbanks

Measures to control livestock access and encourage riparian vegetation growth will be undertaken. This in turn should reduce siltation of Atlantic salmon and Brook lamprey spawning beds and increase prey availability for raptors.

