



# IRD Duhallow LIFE Newsletter

*Project Update (September 2014)*



What a beautiful summer we are having this year. As we write this newsletter, farmers are busy harvesting and bringing in corn, finishing off silage and making other preparations for the winter. After previous wet summers this year has been particularly good for a range of wildlife species. Even the invasive plant the Himalayan balsam is doing particularly well in places outside the reach of the LIFE project.



## Visit by European Commission gives the thumbs up for the LIFE project

The LIFE project and IRD Duhallow experienced its own stress testing in June, in the form of a rigorous inspection of the LIFE project, by desk officers from the European Commission. All aspects of the project were inspected, ranging from conservation actions on the ground, to financing and compliance with EU Regulations. The EC were particularly pleased with the extent of public engagement and as always the support, participation and involvement of the local farming community. This is a particularly important aspect of the project and we are grateful for their continued support. The inspection included visits to three different farms to look at a range of works, from fencing, otter and bird breeding box placement, pasture pumps and solar panel pumps for cattle troughs, silt traps, tree pruning and planting, river bank restoration and removal of the invasive plant Himalayan balsam. A managed cattle river crossing was also carried out, to demonstrate that if livestock are driven across the river, all in one go rather than allowed to stray and wander; soiling of the water can be dramatically reduced. We would like to thank all involved in making this visit a great success and especially the landowners who facilitated the site visits, the Kanturk Trout Angling Club and Duhallow Angling Centre of Excellence who provided fishing demonstrations, local accommodation and service providers, volunteers and the staff of IRD Duhallow.



## Project modification and extension approved

Following the successful EC visit in June, the EU have agreed to extend the duration of the LIFE project until June of next year. This is a very welcome development as it allows us to continue with the project work, some of which has been delayed due to planning restrictions.

## Himalayan balsam

Our work on the removal of the Himalayan balsam continued throughout the summer and there have been noticeable year on year decreases in the range and extent of the plant along the project target areas (River Allow catchment). A large previously unknown but established stand of the plant was recently discovered by the LIFE project along the Brogeen River this year and this is currently being eradicated.





### **Biodiversity Summer camp**

This year and for the first time, IRD Duhallow ran a Biodiversity Camp for children. This was hugely popular with the children with the LIFE Project scientist, Kieran Murphy was on hand, to lend his expertise. The camp ran a range of fun activities, with a particular emphasis on the aquatic environment.

### **New ponds at IRD Duhallow come to LIFE**

Last year the LIFE project assisted in the development of ponds, at the new Pitch and Putt course in Newmarket. The main aim of these ponds is to remove phosphorous runoff, should it occur, from the greens during rainy weather. Volunteers helped plant wild water plants along the pond edges and we are delighted to report that nature has been busy doing the rest. Until recently the ponds were full of tadpoles, as frogs became the first colonisers of the ponds along with Greater Diving Beetles. Now a myriad of aquatic life can be observed from the small black Whirligig Beetles, which zip and dance along the surface of the pond in circular motions to aerobic Swallows swooping down to catch and feed on insect life emerging from the ponds. To everyone's delight the pond has been colonised by the beautiful Azure Damselfly. This delicate damselfly is blue in colour with black banding across its body, and is a relation of the larger Dragonfly. Yes, Dragonflies have also taken up residence in the ponds, both red and green varieties (which have yet to be identified) were spotted laying eggs along the ponds margins.



### **Agri-Environment scheme**

At our recent meeting with landowners along the River Allow, the LIFE project was asked to investigate the possibility of getting farmers along the River Allow priority access to one of the new Agri-Environment schemes (under CAP) recently announced by the Minister for Agriculture. Therefore we are endeavouring to progress this idea and with our partner INTERREG IV TRAP programme, have engaged an Agricultural scientist to facilitate this work. Although there is no guarantee that the proposal will meet with success with the Department, it is broadly agreed that an Agri-Environment scheme designed and developed with and by the landowners, with good scientific input and support, will achieve the best possible outcome. A number of meetings have been held with a range of agencies, including the Department of Agriculture and it is planned to develop the scheme by

individual meetings with small groups of farmers over the coming months. Such a scheme will not only be beneficial in financial terms to participating farmers, but should also utilise the infrastructure already put in place by the LIFE project, maximising the benefits to all concerned. This kind of joined up approach was praised by the EC during their recent visit and we hope that the relevant Irish statutory agencies also lend it their full support.

### **River Allow Catchment Management**

This initiative is ongoing and the second meeting was held in late August. It is important that all private and public sectors engage in this initiative, if we are to see long term improvements in the water quality of the River Allow. The initiative has been praised by both the EPA and the Department of the Environment. It is hoped that real change can be made to improve water quality from human and animal health perspectives, as well as wildlife, angling, recreation and tourism.

The IRD Duhallow LIFE project would to acknowledge and thank all of the landowners, supporters and volunteers for their assistance with the project to date. If you would like further information or participation as a volunteer please contact us for further details. IRD Duhallow LIFE project: Tel: 029-60633 or check us out at [www.duhallowLIFE.com](http://www.duhallowLIFE.com).



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