**BIODIVERSITY PLAN**

**2023 – 2030**

**PROFILE**

Ballybofey & Stranorlar Golf Club is a member-owned sport and community organisation in Stranorlar, Co Donegal. We draw membership (500+ in 2023) from the Finn Valley area and beyond. We serve the sporting needs of the area and make our premises available to various Educational, Sporting, Charitable and Community groups for fundraising events. We have an 18-hole golf course and Golf Shop as well as a modern Clubhouse Bar & Restaurant open to the public.

The Golf Course is a mature 18 - hole parkland area of approximately 85 acres.

The area is currently host to a wide variety of native hard and soft wood trees, hedges and shrubs. It supports many birds with rabbits and foxes and squirrels spotted regularly. The lake holds freshwater fish and many waterfowl. Our resident swan is a unique attraction.

Research has confirmed that greens, fairways, teeing ground and semi-rough areas do not contribute to the conservation of biological diversity. They do not offer protection for animals as they are frequented by humans. The used fertilizers, growth regulators and pesticides are washed out so there is little or no native growth.

Because of the infrequent disturbance by players, hard roughs can be areas with a higher biodiversity than the surrounding area. Depending on the local conditions, they can be the perfect areas for biodiversity-rich habitats, such as natural grassland and meadows. The existing lake had potential to provide a breeding ground for aquatic birds.

**WHY WE NEED A BIODIVERSITY PLAN**

The loss of biodiversity, alongside climate change, is currently one of the largest and most important challenges that golf courses face. The use for leisure purposes of ecosystems and natural resources in various forms has a large impact on nature. The Club depends on the conservation of biodiversity. In addition, a proactive approach to conserving biodiversity can create new business opportunities. A well-planned and managed golf course which is set in a large agricultural landscape could be retreat for animals and plants.

The National Biodiversity Centre along with the Greenkeepers Association has produced a plan for the Pollinator-friendly Management of Golf Courses. Several Club members have expertise in gardening and landscaping. The Tidy Towns Group in Ballybofey & Stranorlar is active and well-informed. There is a wealth of resources that can be exploited with the goal of conservation and enhancing biodiversity at the Golf Course.

**ACTION PLAN**

* Gather interested individuals who are willing to commit to the project for at least 2 years.
* Invite an Ecological expert to lead walk-through of areas of the Course.
* Record in print and through photography the areas of the Course that have potential for development.
* Through liaison with the Greenkeeping Staff, develop a 5-year plan for identified areas to include reduced seasonal mowing.
* Develop engagement with other local communities, e.g., Ard Gréine, local Schools, and work together in planting and maintenance etc.
* Adopt a Pesticide Code.

**CONSIDERATIONS AROUND THE COURSE**

* Liaise with local Men’s Shed to develop nesting and bat boxes.
* Manage meadow areas for pollinators.
* Provide nesting places for bees such as drilled woodblocks and hedgerows.
* Identify areas for wild-flower planting.
* Cut internal hedging on a 3–5-year cycle.
* Long grass at the bottom of some hedging areas should not be sprayed so as allow wildflowers to grow.
* Planting of bulbs etc in feature areas of the Course

**CONSIDERATIONS AROUND THE CLUBHOUSE**

* Create pollinator-friendly containers, flower beds and hanging baskets.
* Consider a Rainwater Harvesting project that can be used in summer watering etc.
* Set aside an area for herbs that could be used in the Restaurant.

**ASSESSING AND REPORTING**

* Seasonal walk through to assess progress and adjustments that may be required.
* Social Media to highlight the project and progress.
* Encourage and engage with feedback from members.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR SCOTTISH GOLF ENVIRONMENT GROUP**

Below are some ideas which you can consider now to increase the biodiversity of your golf course. Remember, in terms of nature conservation you can improve the situation for wildlife by undertaking actions directed at species, or at habitats which will indirectly benefit species:

* Erect bird boxes of differing styles, in different locations around the course. Front holed, open fronted, bird of prey, bottom holed, side holed, and owl boxes can all be put up, and have been seen to be very effective. This can also help raise golfers' awareness of the wildlife on the course.
* Erection of bat boxes can greatly assist in provision of roosting sites. Bat and bird boxes are especially valuable in areas of single species, young or semi mature plantation woodland in which there are few other natural nesting and roosting sites.
* When planting use a diversity of native species, including broadleaves. This will lead to greater invertebrate and bird activity within the woodland.
* Allow decaying timber to remain in the woodland. Where safe keep standing dead trees. If necessary undertake management and create woodpiles of decomposing timber. This provides a haven for decomposers such as woodlice, beetles and fungi.
* Design new planting with uneven edges, subtle contours and grading from tall species to edge shrubs.
* Introduce wildflower plugs into new woodlands to speed up their aging and ecological establishment.
* Ensure sufficient regeneration within woodlands. These will be your woodlands of the future as existing mature trees die off. Consider encouraging regeneration or underplant mature woodlands for future.
* When planting allow for open glades within plantations. This will increase the structural diversity of your woodland and thus increase the diversity of wildlife.
* In young plantations of single species, consider ring barking trees in safe areas to create standing dead timber.
* Reinstate and manage hedgerows and streams. Seek opportunities to create new features.
* Avoid over-manicuring of the course. Study the course and identify areas where cutting intensity can be reduced.
* Identify areas of wildflower interest and conserve through appropriate management.
* Have detailed vegetation surveys carried out for the course and its surrounds. Mapping of habitats and identification of key species will provide information and understanding of the ecology of the course. This will enable you to make more informed decisions.
* Avoid or minimise disturbance by people or vehicles in most sensitive areas of the course.
* Manage gorse to maintain health and vigour in desirable areas. Removal of gorse and other scrub may be necessary in other valuable habitats, e.g., wildflower grasslands and heather.
* Monitor the coverage of bracken, and control if threatening to other more interesting and important habitats. Remember, bracken can be a valuable habitat in its own right, and its control needs to be judged in conjunction with the provision of other habitats.
* Deposit grass cuttings in least sensitive areas, away from open water and avoiding species rich grasslands, heather or woodland floor areas.
* Establish no spray zones and buffer strips around water features and ditches. Minimum of 3 metres.
* Enhance ponds by increasing the amount of native wetland planting around the margins. Possibly in conjunction with redesigning the pond edge, creating shallow shelves and gently sloping banks.
* Create new water features in areas of poor drainage.