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## Year one draws to a close

As the first year of this six year programme draws to a close PLANFORBIO has come a long way. The FORESTBIO research team have completed the first summer season of forest biodiversity survey work and site selection for year two is underway. In addition to successfully completing their first season's fieldwork the team have undertaken a number of training courses, attended and made presentations at a number of conferences and meetings.

The HENHARRIER team have also completed a very successful first field season, aided in the field by workers funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and volunteers from the Irish Raptor Study

Group. This year has seen the commencement of the first ever Hen Harrier tagging project in Ireland and the foundation laid for the first ever remote tracking survey of Irish Hen Harriers. As this species comes increasingly to the attention of the Irish public this project is ideally positioned to inform management decisions at this critical time for hen harrier conservation in Ireland as Special Protection Areas are now being established to provide this bird the opportunity to thrive.

The RHODO project got underway during the past few months, and recruitment is now ongoing for a PhD student to undertake this research project at Waterford Institute of Technology. *Sandra Irwin, UCC*

PLANFORBIO Director: John O'Halloran; Project Manager: Sandra Irwin; Academic staff: Daniel Kelly, Tom Kelly, Fidelma Butler, Fraser Mitchell, Nick McCarthy

FORESTBIO Staff: Post-doctoral researchers: Linda Coote (TCD), Anne Oxbrough (UCC) and Mark Wilson (UCC); PhD students: Veronica French (UCC) Rebecca Martin (UCC) Howard Fox (TCD) and Oisín Sweeney (UCC); Research Assistant, Karen Moore (TCD).

HENHARRIER Staff: Post-doctoral researcher: Mark Wilson (UCC); PhD student: Barry O'Donoghue (UCC, NPWS); Research Assistant Barry O'Mahony (UCC).

## Hen Harrier Tagging a Huge Success

40 Hen Harrier Chicks were wing tagged as part of the PLANFORBIO project with partners involving UCC, IRSG, NPWS and local landowners during the 2007 breeding season. Birds from 4 study regions were

tagged; North Kerry (20), Ballyhouras (11), West Clare (10), and Slieve Aughties (4).

To date 15 individual and authenticated reports of tagged Hen Harrier chicks have

## Hen Harrier Tagging Cont.,



*Bird K, a young male  
in West Clare  
© Barry O'Donoghue*

come into [harriers@environ.ie](mailto:harriers@environ.ie). These reports comprise approximately 30 individual sightings and account for at least 8 different individuals.

Some of the incredible resightings to date include a bird from Cork sighted on numerous occasions around Hook Head in Wexford (seen catching small mammals) and most recently turning up on the Saltee Islands; a Kerry youngster who at only a couple of months old found his way to a traditional winter site in Cork, another Kerry youngster who travelled 200km to Wexford and probably most impressively, a Clare baby who travelled

over 300km north to Derry and since seen in Donegal!

A lot of activity focusing on the South East may indicate a possible migration route to Cornwall and/or Continental Europe. The tagging scheme has opened up a whole new branch of pioneering research on Hen Harriers in Ireland. Who would've thought a Hen Harrier seen in Derry was from West Clare, or a bird on Hook Head was from Kerry! Thanks and credit for success of the tagging scheme are extended to Alyn Walsh, Barry O'Mahony Dave Norriss, Dave Sowter, Geoff Oliver, Kevin Collins, John Lyden, John Wilson,

Tim O'Donoghue and Tony Nagle.

A special warm thanks continues to be given to all those who have contributed Harriers to the National Hen Harrier Winter Roost Survey, for roost watches, sightings both tagged and untagged. Anyone with information on Hen Harriers at any time of year (and historical info) is urged to contact Barry O'Donoghue, Ranger with National Parks and Wildlife Service and Hen Harrier Researcher on the PLANFORBIO project by emailing [harriers@environ.ie](mailto:harriers@environ.ie) or calling 087-9110715.  
*Barry O'Donoghue, NPWS*



*Thermal Fogging  
In a forest canopy*

## Lights, Camera, Action!

If you go down to the woods today, you might be in for a surprise....which is exactly what happened to Rebecca Martin and Oisín Sweeney on Wednesday, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2007. The two Forestbio members travelled to a mid-rotation sitka spruce site (Cullenagh) just south of Port Laoise to meet with Duncan Stewart and the EcoEye production team from RTE television.

The purposes of this visit were to undertake filming of canopy fogging, and to conduct a short interview about forest biodiversity, the general aims of the Planforbio

and Forestbio projects, canopy fogging as a research method and the importance of canopy research in an Irish context, all of which will be aired on an EcoEye program in January 2008. The tree-climbing/epiphyte identification aspects of the project were also briefly discussed, as all the canopy research methods being utilised by Forestbio members are ground-breaking and will produce novel data for Irish forests.

The interview went very well, the fogging was suitably visually impressive, and both Duncan and the production

team were delighted with the results. They will be in contact shortly to finalise airing dates and program contents, so stay posted!

The finished program will consist of a 3-minute slot, with shots of canopy fogging, laboratory identification of invertebrates, an interview about the general aims of the PLANFORBIO research program, and an overview of fogging as a technique for canopy arthropod collection. Filming of Rebecca's work in the laboratory will be completed before December 2007. *Rebecca Martin, UCC*



## Engagement with European Environment Agency

John O'Halloran visited the European Environment Agency, November 2007 where he is an advisor on the Agencies input into the

Forest Status Report for European forests to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The draft report will be sent to EU National Governments for comments before being transmitted to the Meeting of COBD in May 2008

## Ground Flora Surveys 2007

A lot has happened since the last newsletter. Botanical recording continued all through July and August on the same schedule of 4 days in the field and one day in the office. Unfortunately the weather didn't improve much so there were a lot of days spent in the rain. Corinne Vézeau, an SFI funded Ureka student from Université Laval in Quebec, had a bit of an eventful start with her first day in July spent getting soaked to the skin and her second day stranded in Wicklow after a car breakdown! However, that didn't put her off and she spent 5 weeks with us, helping with field recording and taking the hemispherical photographs used to measure the light environment of the forests. This formed the basis of the report she produced, relating light variables and other parameters to species diversity. Her sunny personality helped to make up for the continuing bad

weather.

By the end of July all 20 of the reforestation sites had been studied and the team moved on to the Native woodlands which was a nice break from the spruce needles which seem to find their way into everything. We were also joined briefly by a new field assistant, Buffy the black Labrador, who spent the whole day with us in the oak wood in Waterford, helping us to eat our lunch among other things. We also had an interesting encounter with a small stream which had become a deep river due to the heavy rain, eventually finding a strategically placed fallen tree to cross it on. At the beginning of August Karen took leave to write up her Masters Thesis. She was replaced by Julien Michel, a science graduate and veterinary student from Ecole Nationale Vétérinaire de Toulouse, which greatly

increased the level of French spoken in the field. He also seemed to bring better weather with him. We were back down to 3 field workers for the last 2 weeks when Corinne took some time off to write up her report. The whole team was much relieved when fieldwork at all 30 sites was completed on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August. This was thanks to a lot of long days of hard work. With the ground flora fieldwork done we were able to take a much needed holiday to rest and recuperate before the continuation of the epiphyte survey.

With fieldwork completed the focus has now turned to identification of all of the specimens collected. Sites to be studied for next year's fieldwork are also in the process of being chosen so that we're ready to go back out for more in the spring. Here's hoping for better weather! *Linda Coote, TCD*



*Team member Buffy on fieldwork!*

## Skills Training

During September Karen Moore and Howard Fox (FORESTBIO) participated in a tree-climbing course. Climbing is an arduous activity and Linda, Karen and Howard can spend several

hours in each tree collecting data and this course gave them the confidence to move freely in the tree canopy. Five ash trees, five sessile oak and five mature Sitka spruce were subsequently

climbed. Ropes were left in overnight in many instances when the 1/3 height plots were surveyed in the afternoon and the 2/3 height plots done the next morning. *Howard Fox, TCD*



## PLANFORBIO

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## Forest Task Force Conference

In October, five members of FORESTBIO (John, Sandra, Rebecca, Oisín and Mark) were fortunate enough to attend a two-day international meeting on forest ecological indicators, as part of the sixth annual meeting of BirdLife's European Forest Task Force in Białowieża, Poland. The first day comprised a series of short seminars and workshops on topics including the use of birds, alternative taxa and characteristics (such as deadwood) as indicators of forest biodiversity, definition of concepts such as 'forest naturalness' and 'ecosystem health', and the legislative and management contexts in which indicators must work. At the poster session Rebecca and Oisín presented posters outlining their PhD projects, and John presented a poster describing some of the outputs of BIOFOREST. The Irish contingent contributed enthusiastically to the discussions. The outlook of biodiversity researchers working in young plantation forests, in a part of Europe devoid of almost all of its

native forest, was unfamiliar to many of the delegates. Equally, it was refreshing for PLANFORBIO members to participate in discussions in the context of centuries-old forests. The exchange of information and viewpoints between such widely differing perspectives was both challenging and stimulating.

The highlight of the meeting was an excursion to the strictly protected core area of Białowieża National Park. Białowieża is the best-preserved remaining fragment of the deciduous lowland Europe. We were taken on an 8-hour walk through the wild heart of this fascinating forest, and over were shown a truly inspiring vision of forest biodiversity. Our hosts and those delegates more familiar with European forest diversity than us were very generous with their time and knowledge. Probably the most striking difference between Białowieża and other European deciduous forests is the abundance and variety of standing and fallen

deadwood. The absence of any harvesting for fuel and timber allows this important ecological resource to accumulate to levels of  $150\text{m}^3\text{ha}^{-1}$ . We saw three species of woodpecker, whose association with different types of deadwood makes better indicators of forest naturalness and management intensity than any other European bird taxon. Although it was unseasonably late for forest flowers, the scaffolding of dead trunks and branches supported a myriad of bracket fungi, and a similar diversity of mushrooms and toadstools festooned the forest floor. We saw tracks and field signs of bison and boar; and everywhere there were 'veteran' trees whose straight trunks bore their crowns clear even of the surrounding ancient canopy. Both the forest and the researchers I met during our time in Białowieża made a lasting impression on me, and renewed my appreciation for the biological diversity that forests in Europe can support. *Mark Wilson, UCC*

## Upcoming activities

John O'Halloran has been invited to speak at the Environmental Protection Agency's National Environment conference in February 2008. John will be asking fellow BIOFORESTers and PLANFORBIOers to co-

author this paper on forest and biodiversity in Ireland. Abstract draft to be circulated soon!

A strong presence is planned at ENVIRON 2008, also in February 2008, where Mark Wilson will present a

BIOFOREST poster and Sandra Irwin a PLANFORBIO programme poster. Presentations will also be made by a number of PLANFORBIO detailing the findings of their research projects.