

the nature of

Rathlin

and its townlands



Introduction:

For us, the residents, Rathlin is a very special place. People have lived here for over 7000 years, forging a unique relationship with our island home. The landscapes you see today and their rich and varied biodiversity are the product of successive generations' interactions with the land we farm and the sea we work.

We are part of the island's biodiversity; we live in tandem with it and enjoy its treasures. It has brought others to live here and become part of the community. We are proud to share our knowledge not only on the flora and fauna found here, but all aspects of the natural world – the geology, archaeology, weather, tides and the community spirit which is so fundamental to our lives.

Since the 1950s more and more visitors with a love of nature and the outdoors have come to explore and enjoy our remarkable landscapes and wildlife richness. They include many eminent biologists, archaeologists and academics of all sorts. The island has attracted scientists and diving enthusiasts to enjoy and study our rich maritime heritage, both natural and archaeological.

Recognising growing pressure on the environment and responding to national and international conservation requirements, much of the island and its surrounds have now been designated as Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA). Rathlin is included in the Antrim Coast & Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and a European Marine Site Management Scheme was added in 2013.

This requires sensitive and ongoing negotiation between islanders and legislators, avoiding a sense of additional burden for residents trying to carry out their everyday business and make a living.

It is essential that the island community's own voice is heard and welcomed as one of historic pride in its natural environment. The community, in partnership with others, will be the best guardian of its inherited treasure and in the best position to hand on the opportunity to live, work and enjoy this land and sea to generations of islanders and visitors to come. As one expression of that voice, we began work on this Local Biodiversity Action Plan.



Crown © Historic Environment Division



© Northern Ireland Environment Agency



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What is a Local Biodiversity Action Plan?

Biodiversity is simply the millions of different species that live on our planet and we humans, although only one of these species, are having a huge effect on all the others.

Rathlin islanders know well the importance of a system that works together for strength and mutual benefit. Ferries, roads, electricity and water services, shops, health care, school, housing and much more are all vital to us. If any one of these services is weakened the rest will suffer and an island community becomes more vulnerable.



So it is with biodiversity. It is essential to our way of life, our well-being and our economy both globally and locally. On Rathlin, it nourishes the cattle and sheep, provides pleasure and interest through the sights, sounds and smells of our gardens and hedgerows, hills, loughs, shores and sea. The seabed feeds the fish that feed the seabirds. The seabirds are a visitor attraction which feeds our economy. This interdependence is the essence of our beautiful island home.

Islanders frequently express a genuine and moving love for the island and its way of life, concerned that the natural beauty of the island needs to be kept as well as safeguarding the community's sustainable economy. The community wants to play a lead role so this Plan is local – local actions by local people.

It arises from our pride in and passion for our island and all that makes it special to us. It is the product of lengthy consultation with islanders of all ages and with environmental agencies, particularly the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). It expresses with our own words and images something of what our island means to us and how we intend to work together and with partners to ensure that the biodiversity surrounding us on land and in the sea is sustainably and wisely used for this and future generations.



Rathlin at work and play

Biodiversity is essential to the island's economy and its way of life. Our Local Biodiversity Action Plan takes this seriously and includes our aims of managing local biodiversity to support and enhance the quality of life and economy of the island.

People have lived and worked on and around the island for thousands of years. In the early 1800s the island sustained a population of over 1,500 people. Today the population is around 125, with a noticeable and welcome increase in recent years. The community plays an essential part in caring for the natural and built environment. It's also a great playground...



Farming:

The grazing by cattle and sheep on Rathlin's many hill farms creates a rich biodiversity although added costs are significant and can be punishing due to the island location. However, livestock from Rathlin Island is highly regarded on the market with some farmers winning national organic farming awards. Targeted farm management between Rathlin landowners, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the RSPB has intentionally benefitted key island species such as chough, lapwing,



snipe and Irish hare. Formerly extinct in N. Ireland, Chough have been breeding again since 2007 thanks to sensitive land management by farmers. The Corncrake is virtually extinct in N. Ireland but a financially beneficial collaboration between farmers and the RSPB is providing habitat suitable for their return.

Fishing:



In the mid 1800s, when the potato blight and harsh politics brought bitter tragedy to Ireland's communities, Rathlin islanders may have fared better than many due to an ability to harvest the seas around them. Fishing is a much reduced economy now although, for one family, traditional fishing, particularly for lobster and crab, remains their mainstay.

Responsible harvesting standards include V-notching as a tool in the management of lobster stocks. This involves the notching of the tail of any female egg-carrying lobster before returning it to the sea. The scheme, as well as allowing fishermen to claim for the returned lobsters, increases yield and protects the marine biodiversity. Controls on seabed trawling for scallop that causes long term damage to the marine environment are also adhered to by local fishermen.

A new marine business on the island grows, harvests, processes and exports organic kelp to specialist food retailers in a national and international market. This relies on the perfect conditions of Rathlin's marine environment to produce a premium sea vegetable of high quality for culinary use.



Tourism and Rathlin's biodiversity:

In recent years, the island has hosted approximately 30,000 visitors per annum, the majority being day visitors. Visitors come for countless reasons, from the enjoyment of walks and the variety of birdlife to curiosity about island life or the simple adventure of a boat ride.

- The island now has eight signposted walks, allowing members of the public to enjoy hours and miles of outdoor exploration. Access for many of these walks has been granted by kind permission of island landowners and respect for signposted routes helps protect the landowners' property and rights.
- In 2015 the RSPB and Commissioners of Irish Lights re-opened the West Light Seabird Centre, with spectacular views over N Ireland's largest and most significant breeding seabird colony.
- Bus and boat trips from the harbour allow for visitors to enjoy the best of views and close proximity to puffins, razorbills, guillemots, kittiwakes, fulmars, eider ducks and other species
- The attraction for visitors of Rathlin's rich biodiversity plays a key part in maintaining the frequent ferry service to and from our island
- The island is home to the very popular grey and common seals, often seen in large groups along the shore. (Seals are inquisitive and may allow you to watch from nearby but should not be approached or disturbed.)



Working in partnership:

The intention of the Community is to ensure that island residents are empowered and equipped to be the managers and drivers of our own story. With biodiversity as with many other areas of our lives together, this will be done to better effect in partnership with others.



Useful links:

Rathlin Policy: “Rathlin is (Northern Ireland’s) only offshore inhabited island. The (Northern Ireland) Executive recognises that the challenges faced by such an island community are different from those on the mainland, and therefore recognises that they need to be addressed in a different way. The Executive will support the Rathlin Island community in its development of a plan to ensure the sustainability of island life and the promotion of a vibrant island community...”
www.drdni.gov.uk/rathlin_island_policy.pdf

For more information on Rathlin’s designated areas www.doeni.gov.uk/niea

The RDCA is a key participant in the European Marine Site Management Scheme (EMSMS):
www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/rathlin-island-european-marine-site-management-scheme-2013.pdf

Some island residents are members of the Irish Whale and Dolphin group and the group hosts occasional training weekends on the island. www.iwdg.ie

The waters around Rathlin are home to a fantastic variety of marine wildlife, sometimes visible from the ferries. Rathlin ferry crews operate with understanding of this marine life and have been trained by the WiSe Scheme www.wisescheme.org

The West Light Seabird Centre is only one of the Rathlin sites managed by the RSPB. For information on this and other sites, visit www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/seenature/reserves/guide/r/rathlin/

The West Light is part of the Great Lighthouses of Ireland trail:
www.greatlighthouses.com/lighthouses/rathlin-west-light



**Volunteer Beach Cleaners -
Rathlin residents and Keep NI Beautiful**



**Michael Cecil, Alex Atwood MLA,
Cllr Sandra Hunter launching EMSMS**

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Aims of Rathlin Development & Community Association:

- Improving the quality of life for those living on Rathlin
- Ensuring provision of basic services and infrastructure
- Encouraging appropriate and sustainable social and economic development



For more information...



Rathlin Development & Community Association

Tel: **028 2076 0079 / 078 503 27456**

e-mail: rdca@btconnect.com

website: www.rathlincommunity.org



Townlands Map

A townland (Irish: Baile Fearainn) is a distinctively Irish term for a small geographical division of land, and most have names of Irish Gaelic origin.

Part of the process of creating this Action Plan rested with the young children of St Mary's Primary School learning from the older members of our community. Together we created a jig-saw of the island's traditional townlands. This gave us the opportunity for stimulating conversation between the island's children and the older residents and what each townland has to offer through the wide ranges of biodiversity. Each townland holds part of the rich heritage we are all responsible for keeping alive.

Rathlin Townlands

Kilpatrick is quite an ordinary size
And I think the people in Church Quarter
Are always quite wise,
Kebble is the biggest townland on Rathlin,
Ballynoe is the townland I live in.
In Carvinally there has never been
a car rally.
Ballycarry is the second biggest,
If you don't think so put the fact
to the test.
In a lot of townlands you can find a hare,
But a golden hare is a lot more rare.
There has never been a cartoon,
Based on Carravindoon.
In Craigmacagan I have never
got a suntan.
On the road to Kebble, going
to the lighthouse,
There are loads of bends,
And that is how my poem ends!
By Zach Mitchell (aged 9)

Biodiversity Actions:

As the RDCA and as island residents, in collaboration with others where appropriate, we aim to:

- Promote awareness of Rathlin's biodiversity through literature, audio-visual resources and social media
- Promote and update Rathlin biodiversity material through the RDCA website
- Develop a Rathlin biodiversity information and activity pack with and for schools
- Assist with and promote walking routes on the island, safeguarding private ownership
- Identify areas on the island where interpretation of wildlife and landscape features is appropriate for the benefit of wildlife, visitors and landowners
- Explore ways by which Rathlin's biodiversity can provide further opportunity for local, sustainable employment
- Work with relevant partner organisations to sustain and enhance Rathlin's biodiversity, ensuring clear community engagement
- Assist island landowners in seeking effective methods of pest control and of non-native species
- Encourage development of community garden spaces
- Promote the cultural heritage of the island and its maritime environment
- Redevelop the Kelp Store for use as a facility with value for the local environmental economy
- Develop a renewable energy social enterprise, contributing to the lowering of the island's carbon footprint
- Explore options for Rathlin as a 'Dark Skies area'



BALLYGILL
"Baile Gháill" - townland of the foreigner or the hostages. Sheep and cattle are farmed here and it is the site of the remains of a Neolithic axe factory.

KILPATRICK
"Cill Phadraig" - Church of St. Patrick. Siveard is the highest point on the island (440') with Shron ('nose') jutting out from the hill.

BALLYNAGARD
"Bial na gCeard" - townland of the artificers, of the smiths, tin smiths, or tradesmen.

BALLYCONAGAN
"Baile Coinneaganin" - townland of the rabbits or town of the oak shrubbery. A path to the old coastguard hut (Kintruán) is maintained by the National Trust. Look for Heath Spotted-orchids and Early Purples, or "rockets" as they are called on Rathlin.

BALLYCARRY
"Baile Caraidh" - with several meanings this is the townland of the rocky pond, rugged town, or crooked town, or town of the rough ground. It is privately farmed with cattle.

GLEBE
Churchlands. A Viking standing stone overlooks Church Bay. A corncrake was heard again here in 2014

BALLYNOE
"Baile Nua" - new townland. Crocricket on this townland means "windy hill". Mainly used for farming, the townland has large fields, one named Aganmore.

DEMESNE
Anglo-French for domain, belonging to an estate. Craholter "wee hill", is the site of an historic mass rock.

CRAIGMACAGAN
"Craig Mhic Again" - Macagains Rock. Arkle is a good spot to fish from the rocks.

CARRAVINDOON
"Ceathru an Duin" - Quarterland of the fort. Portavadah on the shore of this townland was used many years ago by locals for fishing. Cattle and sheep are farmed on this private land.

ROONIVOOLIN
"Rubha na bhFaileann" - headland of the seagulls, division of the hill, or point of the island. Along the RSPB pathway watch for peregrines, lapwings and chough. Ushet Lough is used for model yacht races.

CARRAVALLY
"Ceathru na hEaladh" - Quarterland of the stone pillar or Quarterland of the swans. Cattle and sheep are farmed on this private land.

KINRAMER
"An Ceann Ramhar" - meaning the thick end, the large head or promontory. It hosts a variety of habitats and pre-famine 'potato rigs' can also be seen.

KNOCKANS
"An Crocan" - meaning the hillock or little hills. Site of Killaney and old limestone works.

MULLINDRESS
"Maoilena Dreas" - hillock of the brambles, height of the briars.

KINKEEL
"An Ceann Caol" - the narrow end or narrow head. Cattle are farmed on this privately owned land.

CHURCH QUARTER
The island's two churches, the Church of the Immaculate Conception and St. Thomas' Church are both in this townland.

CARRAVINDOON
"Carvindoon...gives me a sense of belonging". (Kay Mc B)

CRAIGMACAGAN
"Coolnacraok with the golden pot, where I belong". (Margaret)

DEMESNE
"Craigherman would be my favourite, as you down to Arkall Bay and Doon". (J.J.)

BALLYNOE
"Carriole is my favourite spot, there is a flat rock there and you can see across to Torr Head and all of the Eastside of the Island". (Loughie)

BALLYCARRY
"Down by the Ports in Ballycarry is my favourite place on Rathlin". (Anne)

ROONIVOOLIN
"It was by the bay (Mill) that I met my husband". (Evelyn)

CHURCH QUARTER
"My favourite place is Park house in Ballynagar where I spent my younger days and there I shall remain". (Duncan)

CHURCH QUARTER
"The wee field... I used to camp there when I first came to Rathlin, and now it's full of houses". (Shauna)

CHURCH QUARTER
"My favourite place is Mill Bay where I spent my childhood hauling and launching boats and paddling in the sea". (Sadie)

Rathlin Quotes

St. Mary's Primary School:

- "Walking along the cliffs". (Pablo)
- "My favourite part of Rathlin is the harbour". (Niamh)
- "My favourite part about Rathlin is that there is not much traffic". (Jack)
- "I love all the nature on Rathlin". (Sorin)
- "I like being at the Rue". (Arah)
- "I really like the beach on Rathlin". (Fallon)
- "I like the views of Rathlin". (Milla)
- "I like the Rue lighthouse". (Zach)
- "I like my house on Rathlin". (Mitchell)

Rathlin Quotes

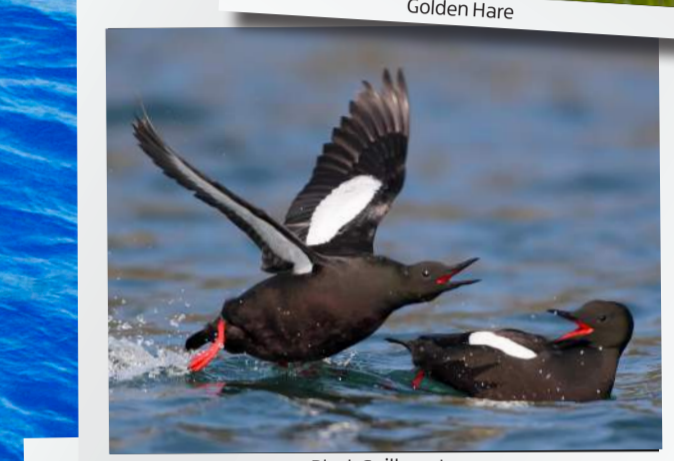
Teaching Staff:

- "Every day I am amazed by Rathlin's changing beauty, the dramatic sky, the seals in the harbour and inquisitive hares". (Jane)
- "I love Rathlin's unpolluted waters, spending time at the shore with my children and being surrounded by the sea". (Julie Ann)
- "Rathlin means home, nature and friendship all rolled into one". (Patricia)

Rathlin Quotes

Tuesday Club:

- "Down by the Ports in Ballycarry is my favourite place on Rathlin". (Anne)
- "It was by the bay (Mill) that I met my husband". (Evelyn)



RATHLIN CODE

We want Rathlin Island to be a clean, safe and enjoyable place for residents, visitors and wildlife.

- Please help us by:
- Enjoying the Island and respecting its life and work
 - Taking your litter home or using the bins provided
 - Taking care on the roads - drive carefully, cycle on the left, walk on the right
 - Guarding against all risk of fire
 - Avoiding damage to walls and fences
 - Keeping your dogs on a lead
 - Protecting all domestic animals, wildlife, plants and trees
 - Respecting the residents' privacy and property
 - Leaving Rathlin as you found it or better!
 - Visiting respectfully - and you will be welcome!