the nature of Rathlin and its townlands

Rathlin residents and Keep NI Beautiful

Working in partnership:

The intention of the Community is to ensure that island residents are empowered and equipped to make a positive contribution to their island home.

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 partnership with others.

The RDCA is a key participant in the European Marine Site Management Scheme (EMSMS):


Some island residents are members of the Irish Whale and Dolphin group and the group hosts

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.rathlincommunity.org

Tourism and Rathlin's biodiversity:

• The island now has eight signposted walks, allowing members of the public to enjoy hours and miles of walks has been granted by kind permission of island

• Bus and boat trips from the harbour allow for visitors to enjoy the service to and from our island

• The island is home to the very popular grey and humpback whales – visitors can watch them from the shore. (Seals are inquisitive and may allow you to

• The island is surrounded by an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and a Special Protection Area (SPA). Rathlin is included in the Antrim Coast & Glens

It is essential that the island community's own voice is heard in any discussion of planning, development and conservation of the island. It is essential that the island community's own voice is heard in any discussion of planning, development and conservation of the island.

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Since the 1950s more and more visitors with a love of nature and birdwatching have been coming to our island. Many of these people are staying longer and returning each year.

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 to many, and the variety of birdlife to curiosity of all ages.

Rathlin islanders know well the importance of a system of agriculture and a sustainable economy. The community wants to play a lead role so this Plan is local – local actions in tandem with it and enjoy its treasures. It has

Biodiversity is essential to the island's economy and its way of life. Our Local Biodiversity Action Plan has been developed by the Rathlin Development and Community Association.

People have lived here for over 7000 years, in the mid 1800s, when the potato blight and harsh politics brought bitter tragedy to Ireland's economy, the island was once again experiencing population decline.

Responsible harvesting standards include

Collaboration between farmers and the RSPB is providing

A new marine business on the island grows, harvests, processes and exports organic kelp to specialist food

high quality for culinary use.

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**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 academicians 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.
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...
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.

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 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


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
Acknowledgements:

This brochure has been developed by the Rathlin Development & Community Association and funded by the NGO Challenge Fund 2015.

All photographs © Tom McDonnell unless otherwise stated

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
Biodiversity Actions:

- 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 education 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 in which Rathlin’s biodiversity could provide other opportunities for local, sustainable enterprise.
- Work with relevant partner organisations to sustain and enhance Rathlin’s biodiversity, promoting their community engagements.
- Assist local landowners in seeking effective landscape management and restoration of peatland.
- Encourage development of community engagement projects.
- Promote the cultural heritage of the island – both natural and manmade.
- Encourage community and visitors to respect the environment.
- Develop new community events to celebrate the annual cycle of events, including the flowering of the heathland.
- Explore options for Rathlin as a Dark Skies area.

Rathlin Quotes

St. Mary’s Primary School

- "Walking along the cliffs, it is really like being on a beach on Rathlin." (Patricia)
- "My favourite part about Rathlin is that there is not much traffic." (Katie)
- "Wildlife on Rathlin is amazing!" (Niamh)
- "Every day I am amazed by Rathlin’s changing beauty, the dramatic sky, the sea in the harbour and hospitable, friendly people." (Sorin)
- "You can see a range of habitats and features is appropriate for the benefit of wildlife, visitors and landowners." (Jack)
- "It is a special place to live and raise our family." (Shauna)
- "I love to visit Rathlin in the winter when the sea is calm and looking for birds." (Jack)
- "The way I see is that I lived here for over 30 years and it is a fantastic place to live." (Millie)
- "The way I see it is that I have lived on Rathlin all my life and it is a fantastic place to live." (Margaret)
- "I really like the area, South Cleggan." (Faulk)
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Teaching Staff

- "Rathlin means home, nature and friendship all rolled into one." (Patricia)
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