



**GREEN FOUNDATION IRELAND
COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE**
(Not Having a Share Capital)



ANNUAL REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

for the year ended

31 December 2022



ANNUAL REPORT ON ACTIVITIES
for the year ended 31 December 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGES
GENERAL OVERVIEW	2 – 3
TALK: Climate Smart Gardening	4 – 5
TALK: Building a Positive Narrative Around Farmers and the Environment	6 – 7
TALK: Weaving a Patchwork Quilt of Hope Around the Globe	8 – 9
TALK: Pine Martens in Ireland	10 – 11
BIODIVERSITY WEEK: Why Pollinators Matter	12 – 14
From Beluga Whales to Steller Sea Lions	15 – 16
Virtual Bat Box Building	17 – 18
EVENT: Farm Walk	19 – 20
HYBRID CONFERENCE: Rethinking Demand: Reality and Opportunity	21 – 23
TALK: Do Healthy Earthworms = Healthy Soils?	24 – 26



GENERAL OVERVIEW

for the year ended 31 December 2022

Green Foundation Ireland aims, through education, to inspire the public to work towards a sustainable society for Ireland.

In 2022, we held ten extremely successful events – eight of which took place online, one was in-person, and one was hybrid (in-person and online). These consisted of the following:

- Climate-Smart Gardening
- Building a Positive Narrative Around Farmers and the Environment
- Weaving a Patchwork Quilt of Hope Around the Globe
- Pine Martens in Ireland
- Biodiversity Week:
 - Why Pollinators Matter
 - From Beluga Whales to Steller Sea Lions
 - Virtual Bat Box Building
- Farm Walk
- Rethinking Demand: Reality and Opportunity
- Do Healthy Earthworms = Healthy Soils?

As always at our events, including those held online, time was allowed to have discussion and interaction between the attendees and the panel of speakers at all of these events which will no doubt lead to important impacts for the wider community.

Details of all these events (including reports, videos and photographs where appropriate), as well as our events held in previous years, are available on the [Events Section of our website here](#).

In addition during 2022 we made a [submission to the Citizen's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss](#), which included a video by Colin Stafford-Johnson.

We also organised [a visit](#) from Jan Philipp Albrecht (the co-president of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Germany) and René Böll (son of Heinrich Böll) to Ireland, which took in the University of Limerick, the Heinrich Böll Cottage in Achill, Belfast, and Dublin. This resulted in the publication of a booklet by GFI "[Reconnecting with Böll – An Irish Journey](#)". We look forward to further collaboration with the Heinrich Böll Foundation in the future.

Our [module on Soils and Soil Stewardship for Transition Year Students](#) was distributed nationally to all Transition Year Co-Ordinators in Secondary Schools and there was very good feedback from the Co-Ordinators.

We also completed a consultation paper on the proposed new Leaving Certificate subject on Climate Change to ensure that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is included in this subject.

Education is key to empowering young people to make a difference in their world and education is central to creating the changes needed for sustainable development to become a reality which has the potential to benefit all of society.



GENERAL OVERVIEW
for the year ended 31 December 2022 *(Continued)*

GFI uses the *Eco Eye* series as a teaching and learning platform for ESD by indexing and in other ways making individual programmes more accessible in short bites on our website.

GFI continues to communicate the already existing resources on the GFI website to a much wider audience of both committed green activists and the interested wider public.

These resources can also be used by educators as part of their curriculum subject development in second level and further education. The GFI website is also available to all students and we are raising awareness of this at a national level.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of our Board and Management Team, as well as to all our supporters, who have all contributed so much to our successful year on a voluntary basis. We are looking forward to the challenges that the coming year will bring.



CLIMATE-SMART GARDENING



7 MARCH 2022

Talk:

[Climate-Smart Gardening](#)

Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

This talk gave practical tips on how to improve your soil fertility, make good compost and thus bring the carbon back into the soil where it belongs. Few people realise that atmospheric carbon can be brought into soils. We also explored some ways in how conventional food production causes climate change – soy bean production equals rainforest destruction. There were also be tips on how to improve the biodiversity in your garden.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER, FACILITATOR and MODERATOR

Klaus Laitenberger is the author of three gardening books: *Vegetables for the Irish Garden*; *Fruit and Vegetables for the Polyunnel and Greenhouse*; and *A Vegetable Grower's Handbook*. He works as an Organic Inspector for the Organic Trust Limited and as a consultant for a number of organic market garden start-ups. Previously, he was the Head Gardener at the Organic Centre in County Leitrim, and restored the gardens of Lissadell House in County Sligo. Together with his wife Joanna, they started a seed company, Green Vegetable Seeds, specialising in the most suited vegetable varieties for the Irish climate as well as the most resistant and delicious ones. He is contributor to various gardening magazines, for example: *The Irish Garden*, *Irish Examiner*, *GIY magazine* and *Clover*. Klaus also works as an organic advisor and runs gardening courses throughout the country.



You can find out [more about Green Vegetable Seeds here](#).

Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, **Donna Mullen**, facilitated our event. Donna is an environmentalist and works as an ecologist, drawing up nature trails and sustainability plans. Her work involves spending many happy hours surveying buildings for bats, and she helped draw up the guidelines on bat surveys for the Heritage Council (Traditional Farm Building Scheme). She is a founder member of both Bat Conservation Ireland and the Irish Environmental Network, and has also served on the board of the Irish Wildlife Trust.

Claire Downey, who is a Director of Green Foundation Ireland and who moderated our event, is Policy and Research Director at the Rediscovery Centre, Ballymun in Dublin. Claire worked magic behind the scenes with live-streaming our talk (for the first time!) to those who could not attend by Zoom.



ABOUT OUR TALK

Klaus emphasised the importance of engaging with gardening and with nature, and not simply engaging on a theoretical basis. He outlined to us the threats facing soils, and the current status of soil health around the world.

He also detailed the importance of soil organic content and how to improve it, the benefits of engaging with gardening, as well as several methods of having a climate-friendly garden. In particular, he informed us how to make the best compost possible, how to create Benjes hedges, and told us about Hügelkultur.

Klaus also mentioned about the potential for soils to combat climate change via carbon sequestration, and told us about some great plant species, such as Jerusalem Artichokes, which sequester carbon effectively!

With over 130 people registering to attend and 63 people participating on the day, this extremely popular talk was a wonderful opportunity for people interested in gardening and sustainable horticulture to get first-hand advice and feedback from an expert in the field.

What was particularly encouraging was that 13 of these people had questions to ask, showing a high level of audience engagement. People asked questions on a wide variety of topics, and Klaus gave informative feedback to all.

You can [access our video of the talk here.](#)





BUILDING A POSITIVE NARRATIVE AROUND FARMERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT



14 MARCH 2022

Talk:

[Building a Positive Narrative Around Farmers and the Environment](#)

Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

There is widespread awareness of the environmental damage that can be caused by the wrong type of farming; however there isn't much discussion of those that are doing a great job farming for nature, about the positive stories, meaning we don't have many good role models.

Encouraging farmers to feel that they are part of the solution, not just the problem, is the first step in a long journey which will require a lot of financial and technical support, new partnerships and new visions.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Brigid Barry is the Project Manager for the Farming for Nature project since June 2018. She works five mornings a week. Prior to this initiative, she was the manager of the landscape charity Burrenbeo Trust for 9 years, biodiversity officer for Clare County Council and a project officer on numerous conservation projects abroad for the previous 10 years.

Brigid comes from a suckler and tillage farm in County Cork. You can [listen here to a podcast](#) on how she became involved in conservation and the background to Farming for Nature.



You can find out [more about Farming for Nature here](#).

ABOUT OUR TALK

Donna Mullen, Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, welcomed everyone to our talk and introduced **Brigid Barry**. Brigid began by discussing Farming for Nature, an organisation that she set up, which encourages, and provides resources to, farmers to foster biodiversity on their agricultural land, as well as engage with water and soil stewardship. Events such as Ambassador Awards recognise the effort and achievements of farmers for engaging with sustainable farming practices, such as regenerative farming. She then mentioned how the engagement has grown year-on year, showing great promise for the future.



GREEN FOUNDATION IRELAND COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE (Not Having a Share Capital)

Brigid went on to detail the advantage of establishing a network of environmental ambassadors, encouraging communication between farmers. Brigid has worked with farmers throughout Ireland to develop accessible educational material for farmers. The focus has been on developing resources by farmers for farmers. Podcasts have been developed in which farmers detail their own experience with, and share their passion for, sustainable farming.



83 people registered to attend or expressed an interest in our talk, while 40 people participated on the evening. Attendee engagement was high, with a number of varied questions asked, and Brigid providing insight to all on how to get involved with Farming for Nature, and the feedback she has received from the farmers involved.

This talk was a really good opportunity for people interested in the relationship between farmers and environmental stewardship to learn about resources and events that explore that relationship.

You can [access our video of the talk here](#).



WEAVING A PATCHWORK QUILT OF HOPE AROUND THE GLOBE



21 MARCH 2022

Talk:

[Weaving a Patchwork Quilt of Hope
Around the Globe](#)

Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

Our talk explored how each of us needs to start at home if we have any land under our care, restore its true nature and grow our own healthy, chemical-free food.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Mary Reynolds is the founder of We Are The Ark. She designs gardens that marry the needs and wishes of the land's guardian with the needs and wishes of the land itself. With her roots in natural gardening theory, Mary seeks to create spaces that are healing, truthful and magical.

She has designed gardens internationally, including a commission for a wild garden at Kew Royal Botanical Gardens in London. Mary's journey from rank outsider to winner of a gold medal at the prestigious Chelsea Flower Show (the youngest woman to do so) has been the inspiration of the film *Dare to be Wild* (2015).

As well as occasional stints of garden television presenting for RTÉ and BBC, Mary has written a comprehensive and ground-breaking book [*The Garden Awakening – Designs to Nurture Our Land and Ourselves*](#) (Green Books, 2016). Her new approach to garden design is a practical treasure map that leads gardeners into a gentle and healing relationship with the land. This book is a step-by-step instruction manual, drawing on ancient methods of working with the land and using them to invite the power and energy of nature back into your life and surround your house and life in its life giving healing embrace.



However, one day Mary was sitting at her desk looking out over her garden when she saw a fox run past and We Are The Ark was born.

You can find out [more about We Are The Ark here.](#)



ABOUT OUR TALK

Donna Mullen, Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, welcomed everyone to our talk and introduced **Mary Reynolds**. Mary began her talk by discussing the importance of wild spaces existing for animals to live. She detailed how current commercial and gardening practices, such as forestry and farming in Ireland are inhospitable to wild animals.

She emphasised the importance of native plants, which have developed complex co-evolved relationships with native animals, and discussed how fashionable gardening, which seeks to display extravagant non-native plant species, is not beneficial to wildlife. Similarly, she discussed how certain plant species considered pollinator-friendly are not truly of benefit to our native pollinators, and that tidy gardens are not conducive to biodiversity.

To assist wildlife and to provide sanctuaries for biodiversity, Mary's solution was to establish an ARK (**A**ct of **R**estorative **K**indness) space, which is a natural space that is un-maintained, and filled with native plants, allowing a safe zone for native biodiversity to flourish. Mary demonstrated several practical tips, such as replacing white lighting, which can impact the life cycles of nocturnal animals, with red lighting, which causes less disturbance, and provided several helpful tips for establishing your own Ark.



58 people registered to attend or expressed an interest in our talk, while 35 people participated on the evening. Attendees were very engaged, with over 10 minutes of questions being asked, and reception was very positive.

You can [access our video of the talk here](#).



PINE MARTENS IN IRELAND



9 APRIL 2022

Talk:

[Pine Martens in Ireland](#)

Held in Moynalty Steam Threshing Museum

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

This talk looked at protecting pine martens in Ireland – and your hens !

Once common throughout the country, by the 20th century pine martens had become extinct from the majority of Ireland, surviving only in a few isolated and fragmented populations mainly in the west. Recent abundance estimates suggest that the total population of pine martens in Ireland is approximately 2,700 individuals, making it Ireland's rarest native mammal species.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Ruth Hanniffy is the Species Conservation Officer at the Vincent Wildlife Trust Ireland. She studied Zoology at the National University of Ireland Galway, undertaking a dietary analysis of the lesser horseshoe bats at Dromore Stables in County Clare. She then completed a Masters in Wildlife Management and Conservation at the University of Reading, carrying out analysis of the density and habitat preference of small mammals on Paxton Pits Nature Reserve in Cambridgeshire. Following this she joined the Environment Agency for eight years as a Biodiversity Officer working on river enhancement and restoration on the River Thames and its Tributaries.



Upon returning to Ireland Ruth worked with Inland Fisheries Ireland as a fisheries assistant carrying out National Water Framework Directive fish surveys of lakes and rivers throughout Ireland. Ruth is a wildlife and landscape photographer.

You can find out **[more about the Vincent Wildlife Trust Ireland here.](#)**

ABOUT OUR TALK

The talk took place in-person at the Moynalty Steam Threshing Museum in Moynalty, Kells, County Meath, with a slideshow presentation, as well as demonstration of pine marten boxes that can be used to provide shelter for them. Ruth began by explaining the conservation status of pine martens in Ireland, including their distribution throughout the country. She also detailed some interesting studies used to examine the behavior and life cycles of these animals in the wild.

Ruth told us about the conflicts that can arise between homeowners and pine martens, and how these conflicts can be managed, as well as the negative media coverage regarding pine martens.

She explained the role of Vincent Wildlife Trust in working with these threatened animals, and in engaging with negative media perception.



Approximately 20 people attended our first in-person indoor event since COVID. There was a high level of audience engagement during questions, and a varied audience, consisting of both people familiar and unfamiliar with pine martens and animal conservation in general.

BIODIVERSITY WEEK:

Why Pollinators Matter



17 MAY 2022

Biodiversity Week:

[Why Pollinators Matter](#)

Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Martin Nolan

ABOUT OUR PHOTO

The lovely photo of a bee in a sunflower was taken by **Martin Nolan**, Director of Green Foundation Ireland, and was commented on by our speaker as a wonderful example of a plant for pollination.

THEME

Plants feed almost every other life form.

During our talk, special attention was given to insect pollinators, but also to other means of pollination.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Mary Montaut, of the Federation of Irish Beekeepers' Associations, was born in England, spent her teens in Australia, went to Cambridge to study English Literature and came to Ireland in 1980.

Until recently the Editor of *The Irish Beekeeper (An Beachaire)*, she has been keeping bees in Bray, County Wicklow, for about twenty-five years and her interest in honey bees has gradually extended to include all sorts of pollinators.



*This event was part of the [National Biodiversity Week 2022](#)
organised by [Irish Environmental Network](#).*



ABOUT OUR TALK

Claire Downey welcomed everyone to our event and introduced **Mary Montaut** from the Federation of Irish Beekeepers' Association, who opened her wonderful talk by explaining that "pollinators matter" because plants cannot move. They are rooted in one spot. Plants rely on pollinators to carry and spread their pollen (or sexual material), and also depend on pollinators to carry and spread their gene pool. Mary recommended the recent book by the English botanist, Timothy Walker [*Pollination: The Enduring Relationship between Plant and Pollinator*](#).

Mary said that the slogan "think global, act local" is a really good one to explain all the small local things we can do to attract and help pollinators and the plants they pollinate. Mary quoted from [*The Diversity of Life*](#) by the American scientist, E. O. Wilson: "Biodiversity is our most valuable but the least appreciated resource".

From a biodiversity point-of-view a neatly mown lawn of grass with no daisies, buttercups or dandelions is a desert. It won't attract pollinators.

She went on to mention that in 2020, Kew Gardens produced a stunning report [*The State of the World's Plants and Fungi*](#) in which it is reckoned that two in every five plants all over the world are threatened with extinction. One of the reasons this is happening is because of loss of habitat. This loss of habitat in turn is caused by farming.

Agricultural land tends to be poor in biodiversity. If you have acres of monoculture, for example, of oilseed rape, then biodiversity falls away and becomes extinct.

Mary continued by talking about the intimate nature of the relationship between pollinators and plants, and the intelligence of plants. Pollination is complex and depends on interaction between plant and animal life. In the intricate complex system of our world, pollination allows lots of species to co-exist. Insects are attracted by the scent from a plant or the nectar not the pollen but they carry and spread the pollen.

There are essentially four types of pollinators:

- **Animals** – small animals carry and spread seeds and pollen as they move around.
- **Water** – some plants live in and pollinate under water, while others, like water lilies, come to the surface of water to blossom and attract pollinators.
- **Wind** – the wind will carry and spread pollen, but the wind is hard on plants.
- **Insects**.

Mary agrees with the American expert on moss who said she believes in photosynthesis, a plant's ability to use sunlight to produce its own nutrition, sugars and carbohydrates.

In his book on pollinators, Timothy Walker gives a 'job description' for a pollinator:

- It must be a safe and timely transporter of pollen – wind and water are not timely.
- The pollinator (or its offspring) should return annually – wind and water less reliable in this respect.
- It should share a habitat with the plant that it is pollinating.
- It shouldn't be too specific about the plants that it wants to pollinate.
- Pollinators must be sufficiently numerous, have sufficient physical fitness and be of a suitable size to keep biodiversity evolving.



Although rising temperatures bring out insects, bumblebees are not coping well with global warming, while other insects are.

There is a mutual dependency between animals and plants. All sorts of creatures are good pollinators. Some have no interest in the pollen, but are attracted by the nectar. Mary then showed us pictures of animals and insects acting as pollinators, including:

- Hoverflies on Ceanothus.
- Ragwort. Attracts pollinators and is not as invasive as we think because it dies out.
- A solitary bee and inula.
- Lapidarius on Thistle. We really need wildflowers. Let insects feed on wild flowers.
- Pascuorum bee (ginger bee) on Eccremocarpus, a tubular flower.
- Honey bee on wild marjoram.
- Edgeworthia and a honey bee.
- The great green wall of Africa. 21 African countries working together to force back desertification and allow regeneration. Loss of habitat caused by overgrazing. Mere stumps of vegetation were left alone to regenerate, just leave them. Look up the great green wall of Africa it is a great example of regeneration.
- Local hedgerows superb illustration of biodiversity. Charles Darwin referred to "this tangled bank".
- Dandelions are brilliant.
- Anything that you like the smell of will attract pollinators for example Daphne has a strong scent.
- Wasps do a great job of eating up pests like greenfly.
- Honey possum on banksia.
- Drakensberg crag lizard on the nectar of a plant.
- The black and white lemur on a traveller's palm is the world's largest pollinator; it forces open the flowers to drink the nectar and the pollen covers its nose.
- Waffle bird feeding on Grevillia.
- Silvereve.
- Rambon lori Keet on Banksia.
- Butterfly on Edgeworthia (which is named after the Irish family!).

Finally, Mary recommended [*The Forgotten Pollinators*](#) by Stephen Buchmann and Gary Paul Nabhan as a wonderful read on the topic.

Claire then ended with thanking Mary for her extremely engaging and interesting talk. With over 30 people attending out of the 51 who registered online, there were many interesting questions in our usual Q&A session.

Anyone lucky enough to have the opportunity to attend one of Mary's talks comes away inspired by her knowledge and enthusiasm and the way she makes seemingly complicated botanic science so easy to understand.

You can [*access our video of the talk here.*](#)

BIODIVERSITY WEEK:

From Beluga Whales to Steller Sea Lions



Photo: *Courtesy of the White Whale Programme*

19 MAY 2022

Biodiversity Week:

[From Beluga Whales to Steller Sea Lions](#)

Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

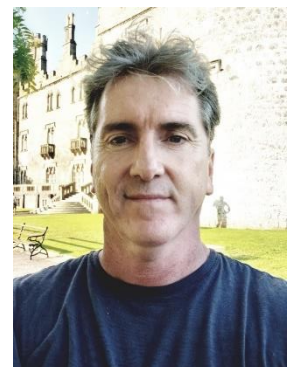
Life in the far north is challenging for human and beast. It also creates unique challenges for those who choose to study wildlife in these regions. But it is worth the effort.

Greg O'Corry-Crowe and his team have been fortunate enough to spend the last 3 decades working in the Arctic and North Pacific Ocean on marine mammals, much of which has been conducted in partnership with indigenous peoples from the Russian Far East to Alaska and Canada. From remote field camps to genetic labs they've tried to unlock many of the mysteries of these incredible animals and their environments. This work must now quicken its pace if we are to understand how polar and sub-polar ecosystems are to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Greg O'Corry-Crowe is currently Professor at the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in Florida Atlantic University.

Much of his childhood was spent in the countryside of Kilkenny, wandering the fields and woods looking for foxes and birds, learning the sights and sounds of nature and pondering important questions like "why do cuckoos spit?". Somehow he made it to University to study Zoology and conduct graduate research on badgers when the badgers and bovine TB issue was emerging in Ireland. He was then fortunate to get a chance to go to Alaska after his studies. That trip shaped the course of Greg's career, not just because of the incredible wildlife and epic scenery but also because of the surprisingly familiar story and view on life of the indigenous people.



For over 25 years Greg and his team have conducted studies on beluga whales, Steller sea lions, polar bears, bottlenose dolphins and ice seals, many in partnership with these northern communities. They have found a way to harness the promise of genetics and genomics and the access and detail satellite telemetry can provide with the uniquely powerful perspectives and insights indigenous knowledge gives, to build a clear understanding of the natural world as well as a deeper sense of our place in it.



ABOUT OUR TALK

Donna Mullen, Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, began our event by welcoming everyone and introducing **Greg O'Corry-Crowe** who is currently Professor at the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in Florida Atlantic University.

Many issues face animals in the Arctic, including climate change and environmental degradation. For much of his research, Greg works with indigenous cultures to study species resilience, and to map endangered species recovery. He also looks at the sustainable use of maritime resources, working on education and policy change.

One of his projects involves Steller sea lions, which he studies on the Aleutian Islands. These volcanic islands are home to the Unangan people, who are a sophisticated hunter-gatherer tribe.

Greg has undertaken DNA analysis and discovered that the sea lion population, which was considered one genetic group, is actually two genetic groupings. This explains their different diet and different species ranges.

Greg showed us footage of some terrifyingly large sea lions, with enormous teeth, which himself and his team had to tag. If this wasn't frightening enough, the team have to climb high, slippery shards of rocks, to put remote cameras on the sea lion rookeries, to monitor populations.

One of his team, **Katie Sweeney**, is asking for help from citizen scientists throughout the world to look at the camera footage and identify individual sea lions. If you can help, please contact [Steller Watch here](#).

Greg's other work involves beluga whales, and he has been tracking their migration, which is around 6,000 km yearly. The migration is along the same route, year after year, and Greg is interested in knowing if the beluga whales have their own culture, and how they learn this route. He is also looking at behavioural shifts in groups, seeing if they alter their behaviour quickly, and how this affects their resilience.

Finally, Greg spoke about the social organisation of beluga whales – do they group together with family or friends? This involved taking skin biopsies and placing satellite tags on these enormous animals in choppy seas. It seems that whales are just like ourselves – hanging out with the best of their families and a big group of friends.

Almost 30 people registered or expressed an interest in our event, out of which 22 attended on the evening, and a lively Q&A session followed Greg's most interesting talk.

Donna then ended with thanking Greg for an absolutely fascinating insight into life in the extreme wilderness of Alaska.

You can [access our video of the talk here](#).

*This event was part of the [National Biodiversity Week 2022](#)
organised by [Irish Environmental Network](#).*

BIODIVERSITY WEEK: *Virtual Bat Box Building*



22 MAY 2022

Biodiversity Week:

[Virtual Bat Box Building](#)

Held in St. Finbarr's Boys National School, Cabra

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

This workshop was not on Zoom, as it was a hands-on, practical event, which initially planned to be carried out in individual homes under COVID guidelines. However, **Connecting Cabra** decided, in conjunction with **Cabra Men's Shed**, to ask one of their local schools, St. Finbarr's Boys National School, if they would be interested in helping to build the bat boxes.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Donna Mullen gave the original talk on bats to some members of **Connecting Cabra**, a group that is seeking to engage and empower as many people as possible to build a low-carbon, sustainable community in Cabra, Dublin 7.

Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, Donna is an environmentalist and works as an ecologist, drawing up nature trails and sustainability plans. Her work involves spending many happy hours surveying buildings for bats, and she helped draw up the guidelines on bat surveys for the Heritage Council (Traditional Farm Building Scheme). She is a founder member of both Bat Conservation Ireland and the Irish Environmental Network, and has also served on the board of the Irish Wildlife Trust.



ABOUT OUR WORKSHOP

Some members of **Connecting Cabra**, a group that is seeking to engage and empower as many people as possible to build a low-carbon, sustainable community in Cabra, Dublin 7, had already attended a talk about bats and these people were supplied with bat box kits to make up before 22 May 2022. Although it was originally planned to make these in their homes, Connecting Cabra decided, in conjunction with **Cabra Men's Shed**, to ask one of their local schools, **St. Finbarr's Boys National School**, if they would be interested in helping to build the bat boxes.

A huge thank you is due to the Principal Maeve Daly, and to the [boys who carried out this task](#) under the supervision of their teacher.



***This event was part of the [National Biodiversity Week 2022](#)
organised by [Irish Environmental Network](#).***



FARM WALK 2022



11 SEPTEMBER 2022

Event:

Farm Walk 2022

Held at Golashane Nature Reserve

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

This farm walk at Golashane Nature Reserve near Kells in County Meath was hosted by GFI's Chair, **Donna Mullen**.

Farming for Nature, which was established in 2018, is an independent, not-for-profit initiative which aims to support high nature value farming in Ireland.

These farm walks are an opportunity for the Farming For Nature farmers to showcase their contribution to nature and good farming practices on their land.

ABOUT OUR FARM WALK

The weather was terrible, with howling winds and rain, yet several intrepid visitors made it to the walk, complete with wellies and raingear. We started with tea and cakes while we discussed each visitor's plans for enhancing nature in their own areas. Then we went out to look at the habitat enhancement measures on the farm.



The farm buildings are being restored under the Heritage Council's Traditional Farm Building Scheme, and as part of that Scheme, measures for bats are being incorporated into the buildings, including a stone bat box, which is built into the wall. We looked at the large barn which has special rafters in place for hibernating bats, then we walked through the forest, discussing the effects of ash dieback, and looking at the bat house.



Next we moved on to pine martens, and looked at the pine marten box. As we walked through the farm we looked at the barn owl boxes (currently being used by kestrels), the hedgerow and the biomass willow. There was much interest in the use of willow for biodiversity.

We also discussed the importance of ponds. We have three ponds currently and have plans to add a fourth this year.

We also looked at the orchard and fruit area, which is fenced for birds and now has attracted jays to the farm.

The afternoon ended with more tea and cakes, and will be followed up by a day in December when some of the participants will come back to take cuttings of plants for use in their own biodiversity projects.

Green Foundation Ireland wishes to acknowledge with thanks that this event has been made possible with the support of The Heritage Council's Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme, and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

You can [see photos of our walk here](#).





RETHINKING DEMAND: Reality and Opportunity



26 OCTOBER 2022

Hybrid Conference:

[Rethinking Demand: Reality and Opportunity](#)

Held in-person: The Mansion House, Dublin

Held online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Tommy Simpson

BACKGROUND

Green European Foundation, with the support of Green Foundation Ireland and Green House Think Tank, organised a hybrid conference 'Rethinking Demand: Reality and Opportunity' in the Oak Room of Dublin's Mansion House on 26 October 2022. At this event, a paper [Rethinking Energy Demand](#), which was published by Green House Think Tank in the UK and written by Peter Sims, Nadine Storey and Jonathan Essex, was launched and discussed.

Sien Hasker provided the guidance and support on behalf of Green European Foundation.

Tommy Simpson was Green Foundation Ireland's Co-Ordinator for this project, Davie Philip of Cultivate was the Facilitator, and Ann O'Conarain was the Administrator. The event was organised and recorded by John Gormley.

ABOUT OUR HYBRID CONFERENCE

Darcy Lonergan, the Deputy Lord Mayor of Dublin, welcomed all participants to the Mansion House including those who were participating by Zoom. She was followed by Nuala Ahern, former Chair of the Green Foundation Ireland (GFI), who thanked the organisers and sponsors of the event.

Davie Philip explained to the audience of around 50 people in-person and 70 online how the day would proceed. He assured the audience that, not only would they get to hear the expert speakers, but there would be adequate opportunity to participate and ask questions.

He then invited Sien Hasker to speak from Brussels. Sien outlined the work of Green European Foundation (GEF) and how they had worked previously with Green House Think Tank and with GFI. She regretted that she could not be there in person and wished all the participants a successful day.

Davie then asked Jonathan Essex and Peter Sims of Green House Think Tank to present their paper which was available to audience members in hard copy.

Jonathan and Peter gave a PowerPoint presentation on the big screen in the Oak Room of the Mansion House.

They described the project methodology and how the focus was on direct energy demand not wider resource use. They had conducted Interviews with over 30 academics, thought leaders and green politicians between June and September 2022, as well as two round table discussions.



The key question they wanted to answer was: **what do we mean by rethinking energy demand?**

Their stated aim was to change the demand for energy services, not just how they are provided.

Societies now needed to make key choices, which could be summed up as follows:

- Carbon overshoot or reduce demand?
- Status quo or disruption?
- Redistribution or locked-in unfairness?

Because of this new emergency, it was now time for a new system of governance which would look at new post growth objectives, ensure fairness and a bottom up approach.

They then went on to suggest a package of policies that would combine sticks and carrots, including sector level and economy-wide programmes for a 'just transition' of supply.

They concluded their presentation by talking about the importance of narratives. Only by changing the prevailing narrative can we change culture. The 'why' matters not just the 'what'.

We need to trust people with reality and complexity. We need to overcome the view that "other people will do this as it will make us unpopular and does not win you votes". The whole message is needed – not barriers in our mindset or being too scared to say the right thing.

There was then a number of responses to the paper.

Sadhbh O'Neill from the Centre of Climate and Society in Dublin City University highlighted the need to focus on degrowth. She expressed disappointment that so few politicians in Dáil Éireann (the Irish Parliament) have ever spoken about the need for degrowth. She asked how can we repackage this essential concept to make it less daunting for the public.

Orla Kelly, Assistant Professor at the Department of Social work and Social Justice in University College Dublin, welcomed the report. She said the time for incremental change is past. It is about structural change which is far more important than individual change. We are in this situation because corporate interests have stalled any changes. She cited the newspaper, the *Irish Farmers Journal*, as one example of this. Environmental needs and social needs are not oppositional. The narrative needs to change.

At this point Davie took questions and points from the audience, both from those in-person and online. Those who spoke did so from the podium. Peter and Jonathan then reasoned to the points raised.

After a short networking break, **Michael Smith** of Village Magazine took over as chair of the session.

He introduced **John Gibbons**, the environmental journalist and campaigner. John stated that he spent most of his time speaking to the unconverted unlike those at this seminar. As a communicator, he tries to simplify the message. We have exceeded 6 of the 9 planetary boundaries – which is the equivalent of multiple organ failure. The big question not answered in the report is how to do we 'bell the climate cat'.



Claire Downey from the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun spoke about how recycling and the circular economy can play an important role in reducing our carbon footprint. She illustrated her point by talking about the mobile phone components that can be recycled. The main point is how do we engage with citizens.

Davie Philip from Cultivate indicated that a community-led approach to regional resilience is needed because it is clear we are going to have to live with the immediate problems of climate change. In particular he focused on co-operatives.

Rosalind Skillen, an environmentalist and columnist with the *Belfast Telegraph*, talked about shaping the narrative away from green austerity to real opportunity and a better quality of life. We have a choice about dealing with the vested interests embedded in our political system.

All of the speakers then addressed questions from the audience and those online.

The gathering was addressed by **Minister Ossian Smyth**, who has overall responsibility for the circular economy in the Irish government. He told us that moving towards a new model of the economy was a 'cultural challenge'. He said gradually things are changing. GDP and consuming more are not good measurements of quality of life and sustainability. In fact, measuring our prosperity by how fast we consume finite resources is a 'stupid idea'.

More questions and points were taken from the audience and **Sadhbh O'Neill** summed up the main points of the afternoon.

Finally, the conference organiser **John Gormley** thanked everybody, particularly GEF, for their participation and support. He told everyone that he had addressed the first COP in Berlin in 1995 as Lord Mayor of Dublin and had also attended the 2009 COP in Copenhagen as Minister for the Environment. He said degrowth represented the only viable path to a solution.

You can [access the videos of our hybrid conference here](#),
and [see photos of our hybrid conference here](#).

DO HEALTHY EARTHWORMS = HEALTHY SOILS ?



*Photo by: MARTIN NOLAN,
Director of Green Foundation Ireland*

10 NOVEMBER 2022

Talk:

[Do Healthy Earthworms = Healthy Soils ?](#)

Held Online by Zoom

GFI Co-Ordinator: Donna Mullen

THEME

Earthworms are widely regarded as being beneficial to soils and are often used as indicators of soil health. However, as Darwin first observed, sometimes you can dig up soil from two different parts of the same field and, for no apparent reason, find completely different numbers of earthworms.

In this talk Mark Hodson discussed the various benefits that earthworms bring to soils but also some of the reasons why we need to be cautious about how we interpret the presence of earthworms.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Mark Hodson, who is Professor at the Department of Environment and Geography in the University of York, has been fascinated by bugs since an early age when he spent lots of time collecting ladybirds and woodlice.

He got diverted by rocks and studied geology at university but for the last thirty years or so has conducted research on a variety of applied soil science topics such as combating the effects of acid rain and decontaminating the soils at former metal mines. Much of Mark's research involves earthworm ecology and understanding how earthworm activity impacts on soil processes.



ABOUT OUR FACILITATOR

Claire Downey, who is a Director of Green Foundation Ireland, is Policy and Research Director at the Rediscovery Centre, in Ballymun, Dublin.



ABOUT OUR TALK

Claire Downey welcomed everyone to our event and introduced **Mark Hodson**, who began his talk by outlining the various benefits that earthworms bring to soils but giving reasons why we needed to be cautious about how we interpret the presence of earthworms. He tackled his subject in a light and accessible way that made it easy listening for the non-scientist, as well as covering the needs of the number of soil research scientists who joined us for the talk.

Mark opened the session by reminding us that Darwin in 1881 eulogised earthworms saying "*it may be doubted if there are any other animals which have played such an import part in our world*". Mark agreed with Darwin's views saying that, for example, earthworms decompose organic matter, allow soils to drain and oxygenate, and prevent soil erosion.

Earthworms are widely regarded as being beneficial to soils and are often used as indicators of soil health. This then leads us to consider what is a healthy soil? Do healthy soils always contain earthworms and is a soil that contains earthworms healthy?

We were then given some examples of where earthworms were actually found in toxic soils, where they can modify their DNA to tolerate toxic metals and therefore thrive in these unhealthy soils contaminated by arsenic as well as by metals such as lead and zinc. These earthworms have evolved to tolerate certain toxins; however there is no convincing evidence that they are useful in detoxifying contaminated soils.

Mark went on to describe a major research project covering all parts of Great Britain, from Aberdeen to the south of England and including Wales, which aimed to discover what is controlling earthworm density. They did, in fact, find that density varied considerably even in the same field but found no simple relationship between abundance and chemical or physical properties.

"As Darwin first observed, sometimes you can dig up soil from two different parts of the same field and, for no apparent reason, find completely different numbers of earthworms."

They substantiated Darwin's observation and looked for factors that controlled density such as wetness, coldness, pH, soil moisture, and nitrate preference.

They confirmed that climate related factors, soil density and nitrates all affect earthworm density, as does wetness, coldness, pH and soil moisture. Earthworms are essentially aquatic, so moisture levels in soils are essential for any density. They can endure slurry provided it is not too dry – the immediate impact is to reduce density but as slurry breaks down density increases again.

They also confirmed that it was not always the least managed fields that were the most dense. Teasing out the variables leading to abundance is complex. They can conclude that abundance is greatest in pasture – forest soils are less abundant as are hedgerow soils. So pasture sward has good density but there is no difference in density from different vegetation cover. They arrived at no conclusive evidence for density. Worms thrive on organic matter such as cowpats, but there is not a clear and obvious relationship to abundance.

95 people registered or expressed an interest in our event, out of which almost 50 participated on the evening, and a lively and interesting Q&A session followed Mark's fascinating talk, with some really engaging questions being asked. They were mostly highly scientific, with soil research to the fore —people obviously relished the opportunity to question Mark.



One of the more intriguing questions for generalists was "are earthworms social animals and could this explain density"? The conclusion was there is no evidence for sociability and density was more likely due to other factors such as moisture and soil density.

For further study, an important resource recommended by Mark is Emma Sherlock's book [*Key to the Earthworms of the UK and Ireland*](#) (Field Studies Council, 2018).

He also mentioned that a good source of information about earthworms can be found on the website of the [Earthworm Society of Britain](#), and that the earthworm citizens science project [Earthworm Watch](#) (although data collection for this project is now closed) may be of interest.

Mark's talk was much appreciated by the audience from Ireland, the UK, other regions of Europe, as well as from the USA and Tasmania in Australia. He was sincerely thanked by Claire for providing us with such an wonderful insight into the world of earthworms.

You can [access our video of the talk here](#).

