



“Restoration of the Lower Shannon SAC (Mulkear River) for Sea Lamprey, Atlantic Salmon and the European Otter”

Press Release

2nd April 2014

Last Outing of the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers

Last Saturday (29th March 2014) the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers were greeted by the sight of the first early arrival of Sand Martins in 2014. As is often the case they arrived on Lower Mulkear ahead of many other areas in the South West. It can be expected that their numbers will greatly increase over the next number of weeks and by the end of April the Mulkear Catchment and Limerick City is likely to be buzzing with the sounds of Sand Martins, House Martins, Swifts and Barn Swallows.



Sand Martin at Annacotty on the Mulkear (Image: Ruairí Ó Conchúir)

The focus on the MCV work at the first site was the removal of *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, more commonly known as Giant hogweed. This non-native invasive plant species is easy to identify when fully grown by height, size of leaves and size of flowers. It can be confused with native hogweed when not fully grown or when growth is stunted (e.g. regrowth after cutting). Introduced as an ornamental it was first recorded in Ireland in 1902. It spreads solely by seeds, mainly through deliberate planting, wind dispersal and in water courses.



Mild weather has assisted in the regrowth of Giant Hogweed (Image: R. Ó Conchúir)

The focus on the MCV work at the first site above Annacotty weir was the removal of *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, more commonly known as Giant hogweed. This non-native invasive plant species is easy to identify when fully grown by height, size of leaves and size of flowers. It can be confused with native hogweed when not fully grown or when growth is stunted (e.g. regrowth after cutting). Introduced as an ornamental it was first recorded in Ireland in 1902. It spreads solely by seeds, mainly through deliberate planting, wind dispersal and in water courses.

Giant Hogweed in particular is a major danger to children playing along river banks. Before the MCV volunteers undertook their work on Saturday morning, a young child was playing on the ground with her mother along the river bank. The mother was aware of the danger of nettles but was totally oblivious to the more serious dangers posed by Giant Hogweed. Contact with any part of this plant must be avoided as even minute amounts of sap can cause blistering of the skin following exposure to sunlight.



Tree planting on the banks of the Mulkear River (Image: Gordon Young)

MulkearLIFE in partnership with the Office of Public Works (OPW) and Limerick County Council have been monitoring and controlling the impacts of Giant Hogweed in the Mulkear catchment since 2009. Giant Hogweed is problematic along the entire course of the River Mulkear and indeed throughout the entire Mulkear catchment. Dense infestations of giant hogweed alter the ecology of riparian habitats by suppressing indigenous plant species which results in a significant reduction in floral and faunal diversity. These dense stands can suppress and exclude all other plants which play an important role in river bank stabilisation. When hogweed dies back in winter the exposed soils can be washed into the river during floods. This was certainly the case in certain areas of the Mulkear and Newport rivers in recent years. This process, especially during prolonged periods of flooding, destabilises the banks and the sediment washed into the rivers can destroy the spawning gravels of resident fish populations. The interconnectivity of all of MulkearLIFE's work, including its work on the control of non-native invasives like Giant Hogweed, is highlighted in the potential impact of destabilised river banks and the loss of spawning habitat directly impacts sea lamprey and Atlantic salmon which in turn reduces the food supply for otter. The loss of native riparian plants and the destabilisation of the river banks negatively impacts biodiversity.

MCV members also undertook additional work at other sites on the Lower Mulkear River. This was focused on riparian management and included extensive tree planting, path repair work, clearing of fallen trees and opening of pathways.



Members at work on the banks of the Mulkear (Image: Ruairí Ó Conchúir)

MulkearLIFE would like to sincerely thank all MCV members for giving of their time and skills in support of this important work.

The next scheduled practical conservation outing of the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers will take place on Saturday, 26th April 2014.

Notes for Editors

1. High Resolution Digital Images are available to accompany this Press Release.
2. Interviews can be arranged with the Project Manager by using the contact details below.

3. MulkearLIFE is a new €1.75 million European Commission funded LIFE Nature project working on the restoration of the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation (with a focus on the Mulkear River catchment) for Atlantic Salmon, Sea Lamprey and European Otter. Further details may be viewed on the project website www.mulkearlifeproject.com
4. Inland Fisheries Ireland (Limerick) is lead partner together with the OPW and Limerick County Council. Additional funding support comes from National Parks and Wildlife Service. Other supporters include Teagasc, IFA, ICMSA, and local angling groups.
5. The project is one of the first and most important integrated catchment management projects in Ireland. It is a flagship EU LIFE Nature project –covering some 650 sq km which contain a variety of habitats and protected species. Much of the area is designated as a Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EU Habitats Directive and forms part of the Natura 2000 Network.

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