



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

Press Release

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What Lies Beneath The Shannon Estuary Surfaces

Dr. Simon Berrow of the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation has been a regular guest of MulkearLIFE. His most recent illustrated talk, “Shannon’s Dolphins – What Lies Beneath the Estuary” came home to roost in a most unusual manner earlier this month when Dr. Berrow’s colleague Ms. Joanna Barker, a researcher with the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation, snapped this wonderful image in the estuary.

On first examination it would appear to be a normal image of a Bottlenose Dolphin jumping in shallow waters of the estuary, one of over a hundred resident in the Shannon Estuary within the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation (SAC). On closer examination the image reveals a hitch hiker – none other than a friendly parasitic lamprey.

While difficult to say with absolute certainty it looks like a River Lamprey but could be a juvenile Sea Lamprey. Given the dolphin is only a young calf and not fully mature, the likelihood is that the lamprey attached itself to the dolphin in the shallows and removal will take place sooner rather than later. The image highlights the interrelationship between the work of the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation / Irish Whale and Dolphin Group and the work of MulkearLIFE / Inland Fisheries Ireland. Both the bottlenose dolphin and the lamprey (river, brook and sea) are protected species in the Lower Shannon SAC.

Ms. Barker noted that the image was taken in a shallow part of the estuary, just south of Scatterry Island of the County Clare coast. This calf was photographed in a group of adult females. The Lower Shannon is the only protected site for dolphins in Ireland and is home to a resident group of bottlenoses. They calve in the estuary from May to September each year.

Interestingly, the first place adult prize winner and overall winner in MulkearLIFE’s recent photo competition was an image entitled “Smiling Bottlenose Dolphin”. It is doubtful Ms. Rachel Crowley’s image would have won if a parasitic lamprey was hanging from its body – perhaps this is just more more of the ‘The Beauty and the Beast’.

MulkearLIFE congratulates its friends and colleagues in the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation and the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group.

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.mulkearlife.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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