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

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## Press Release

7<sup>th</sup> November 2011

### White Tailed Sea Eagles on the Shannon

When you are searching for a bird, described as resembling a ‘flying door’ in terms of its sheer size you know you have to be extremely unlucky not to spot it in the sky. But what sky and where to look? So setting off at dawn last Saturday on a near perfect day, MulkearLIFE, in the company of John Murphy and members of the Mulkear Conservation Volunteers, left the Mulkear Catchment to search the skies above Lough Derg on the Shannon.

Reports had been noted that two birds had set up residence on Lough Derg with a possible third bird at the upper end of Lough Derg. The white tailed sea eagles on Lough Derg are exceptional predators and are an excellent indicator species on the health of the Lough Derg ecosystem and the Shannon system in general. Essentially, they are a bio monitor of the health of the local environment.

The first indication that we had hit lucky was on a site above Williamstown Quay when the shouts of ‘Sea Eagle Sea Eagle’ came bellowing through the air. John Murphy, to his credit, was on the ball and within minutes we were all viewing one, then two, white tailed sea eagles being mobbed by a massive flock of crows. Moving along the shore scopes were set-up with excellent views of the aerial bombardment. At all times the birds were at a very considerable distance – hence the image quality is very poor.

The sheer size of the birds at such a distance was breathtaking. The birds moved on along the shore but continued to be mobbed everywhere they moved by crows and gulls.

The Lough Derg birds are part of the White-tailed Sea Eagle Reintroduction Project which started in 2007. It is been managed by the Golden Eagle Trust, in partnership with the NPWS and in collaboration with the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research and the Directorate for Nature Management in Norway who have kindly provided the wild birds. The Project’s aim is to establish a viable population of wild birds based in Killarney National Park but with the hope that they would spread out throughout the country. The White-tailed Eagle was once resident in Ireland but both it and the Golden Eagle disappeared over a hundred years ago following persecution by man. All released birds have been fitted with radio-transmitters or satellite transmitters that allow the birds to be tracked in the wild. Eagles released over the past five years (2007-2011) have already dispersed throughout Ireland and even further. Irish released Sea Eagles have been reported from Northern Ireland and Scotland, including one bird travelling to the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland before returning to Kerry.

The reintroducing of sea eagles has been one of the most challenging and exciting conservation projects ever undertaken in Ireland. Immature eagles, including the two (and possibly three) now resident on Lough Derg, disperse over a wide area, as they begin to mature and pair up at 4-5 years old they establish territories along the coast and inland lakes where they are resident throughout their lifetime. As sea eagles take some 5-6 years to mature and breed the first breeding attempts are expected by 2012-2013. Establishing a viable population is dependent on low adult mortality and good local community support.

MulkearLIFE wishes our colleagues in the Golden Eagle Trust every success in the coming years.

## 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](http://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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