

Cork Environmental Forum

Position Paper 13 - Hedgerow Conservation

The appointment of a County Council Nature Conservation Officer is an essential first step to establishing a Programme for Hedgerow Conservation throughout the County.



Hedgerows are an integrated part of the Irish countryside and are very important linear habitats for wildlife throughout County Cork.

The value of hedgerows is the way they provide:

- 🌿 shelter and sustenance to wildlife;
- 🌿 vital links as wildlife corridors between different habitats, particularly woodlands;
- 🌿 important visual amenity, in both rural and urban settings;
- 🌿 shelter from the wind and shade from the sun to travellers on rural roads;
- 🌿 shelter and shade to farm animals and prevent soil erosion on farms;
- 🌿 valuable seed banks and repositories of fauna species both native and naturalised, including predators to many crop pests;
- 🌿 dynamic ecosystems taking many years to reach maturity;

Without careful management employing organic practices and careful trimming which controls the amount of light reaching the smaller plants, yet retains larger woody plants for shelter and structure to conserve the balance of species, hedgerows will eventually revert to woodland. Care must be taken in maintenance of existing hedges to avoid unnecessary reduction of the hedgerow and disturbance to wildlife. Over-trimming or application of chemicals will result in loss of shelter, structure and species:

- 🌿 Hedgerows should never be trimmed during summer or autumn.
- 🌿 Hedgerows can be managed by pollarding, coppicing and general trimming.
- 🌿 Hedgerows should be retained and allowed to develop wherever possible.
- 🌿 Education about the value, fragility and the need to conserve and manage hedgerows should be extended to all sectors, particularly young people and persons involved in rural based pursuits and employment.
- 🌿 Hedgerows should be afforded protection through special status in the County Development Plan for their value, in particular along scenic routes and on farmland.

The management of hedgerows should be consistent with care for their wildlife and visual amenity while respecting the needs of the landowner and road safety requirements. Management and maintenance information and advice is widely available (including public libraries) and should be referred to prior to extensive trimming. Hedgerows should wherever possible be trimmed by hand. The 3 main ways of cutting a hedge are:

- 🌿 The reciprocating cutter bar for annual trimming of soft growth.
- 🌿 The flail cutter for 2-3 year old growth.
- 🌿 The circular saw for overgrown hedged.

Training in careful hedgerow management needs to be widely available and should be required of local authority and other professional contractors. Hedgerows on farmland should be retained, carefully managed and extended wherever possible, with little or no pesticide sprays employed in their vicinity. Hedgerows should not be burned off.

The Roads Act 1993 requires landowners to take 'all reasonable care' with regards to roadside hedgerow management. A DoE booklet, available from County Council Offices provides lay information about this legislation.

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To foster, promote & implement sustainable development within the Cork region