

# Protecting and Promoting Nature

The Impact of Philanthropy

Spring 2026

**“Philanthropy has been the catalyst for change through providing the resources, stability and encouragement needed to turn ideas into action.”**

- Burrenbeo Trust

*Cover Photo:* A Grey Seal off the Saltee Islands, Wexford. Photograph: Dave Walsh

30 Merrion Square North, Dublin 2, D02 VE40 | Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20044886 | Company Registration No: 338427 | Charity No: CHY 13967

## Addressing a Crisis

People, place, and planet are priorities for Community Foundation Ireland in advancing our Equality mission. Informing our work as a philanthropic hub, this approach has seen the Foundation take a leadership role in addressing the crisis in nature.

The mission of 'Equality For All in Communities where People and Nature Thrive' shapes how we work with donors, how we invest and how we make grants.

In responding to the Biodiversity National Emergency declared in 2019, the Community Foundation acts to mobilise resources across its network of partners with strategic giving ensuring every euro delivers maximum impact.

We bring with us expertise formed since 2000, through connectivity, knowledge sharing and partnership with 5,000 voluntary, community and charitable groups as well as researchers and advocates. This work is supported with €200 million in combined donations - including an established endowment fund.

Biodiversity loss is at critical levels, with species and habitats declining faster than ever before. Ecosystems sustaining human life and wellbeing are threatened. As a Foundation we cannot achieve our mission without ending the crisis in nature.

This report spotlights key areas of work, with hundreds of communities, farmers and ecological experts. Behind the headline figures it tells the story of how philanthropic partnerships at local and national level combine to save our most critically endangered plants, animals and habitats.

From local awareness raising and community actions, to saving our riverbanks, coasts and forests, we welcome the leadership of our partners, including their ability to identify and promote pioneering efforts to address the crisis in nature. I encourage you to become part of the mission, check out [www.communityfoundation.ie](http://www.communityfoundation.ie)



**Denise Charlton**

*CEO*

*Community Foundation Ireland*

## The Role of Philanthropy

Community Foundation Ireland as a philanthropic hub engages local communities while also seeking systemic change to reverse the huge damage inflicted on nature.

A network of small grassroot community initiatives continues to grow across the country, while researchers, advocates and academia are supported to collaborate and scale impactful solutions.

The results include conservation projects, species protection initiatives, community education, policy advocacy and long-term ecosystem restoration.

Donors are central to advancing the nature agenda through strategic giving vehicles such as Donor-Advised Funds and accessing philanthropic advisory services.

Irish philanthropy often allows projects and partnerships which otherwise would not happen. It is responding to the crisis in nature in innovative ways. At Community Foundation Ireland, we remain committed to a partnership approach, bringing together communities, the experts and donors with vision so generations to come can enjoy our natural world.



# Our Approach



## How Philanthropy Works to Make a Change

### Place-Based Insights and Action

Local biodiversity action plans have been developed and implemented across 300 communities through a pioneering partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Meadow restoration, pollinator protection, promotion of local plants and wildlife, removal of invasive species and many more actions are delivered by pairing communities with expert ecologists.

### Convenor

Ensuring effective co-ordinated actions by bringing together and developing networks of ecologists, researchers, advocates, communities and other partners.

### Capacity Support

Keeping the primary focus of national and expert groups on habitat restoration, invasive species removal and increasing breeding success through building internal resources and capacity.

### Expert Governance and Due Diligence

Upholding the highest standards of governance, including robust due diligence, financial controls and conflict-of-interest management.

### Long-Term Commitment

Allowing sustained impact over the long term for generations to come through our endowment fund model.



# Impact



## Delivering at the Grassroots

Through partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and with the support of other donors our work with hundreds of communities is having a real change on the ground - both in terms of critical areas of need and growing awareness. It is a network which has grown to over 300 partners since 2019.

Local partners focusing on critical actions, informed by ecologists:

- **67%** are pollinator planting
- **40%** in meadow creation
- **38%** protect and promote hedgerows

Using local knowledge, volunteer energy, and strong community trust to change hearts and minds:

- **99%** report improved understanding of habitats
- **74%** reported attitude change within their community
- **50%** have increased volunteer base

Significantly 80% share their findings with the National Biodiversity Data Centre contributing to a national mapping exercise. While over a third are now engaging with local farmers and land-owners as important partners both in terms of land use but also for knowledge of nature often passed from generation to generation.

## Local Action, International Impact

The Karst landscape of Roscommon, known as 'The Rocks' is now a site of European importance following the work of the Taughmaconnell Community Centre. Led by local farmer Liam Kildea, it shows a small biodiversity grant becoming transformational.

In January 2023 Ecologist Linda Gilsenan established this area as incredibly rich in biodiversity, with a landscape similar to the Burren.

Further development of the Action Plan supported with grants allowed deeper surveys, work with local farmers, and virtual fencing projects protecting delicate habitats.

International recognition through the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) and the 'Karst Farming Network' comes with grants of €1.6 million to focus on old and new farming technologies conserving species-rich grassland.

The early support of the Community Foundation proved instrumental in this success.





## AXA Parks Fund

When AXA first set out to develop the AXA Parks Fund, its top priority was to support local areas and the people in them. Through partnership with Community Foundation Ireland, the remit of the Fund was enhanced to include biodiversity protection.

Over €800,000 to over 80 projects across the island has seen pocket forests in urban areas, pollinator corridors and native trees in parks, and walkways on sand dunes that allow community access without damaging fragile ecosystems.

Community  
Foundation  
Ireland

***“We faced some challenges, particularly weather related with our trees. In June we had to water the trees locally to ensure their survival, but we succeeded! The local community really appreciate the work that has gone into the area and the walkway is very well used. One of the biggest highlights was the Project Day at Ballyglunin Station. Children from Crumlin and Annagh NS were very proud to display their projects on the biodiversity in the local area, they put in an incredible amount of work and the display attracted a huge crowd.”***

***– Ballyglunin Community Development Company,  
Co. Galway***



A Puffin on Skellig Michael, Kerry.  
Photograph Tom Archer for Tourism Ireland

## **National Partners: The Evidence for Systemic Change**

Strong expert civil society has a vital part in protecting and restoring nature.

Supporting 100 of these bigger scale and scope projects between 2019 and 2024 with total grant-making of €2.18m allows innovation, collaboration and scaling of solutions.

Increased breeding success for threatened birds such as Lapwing, habitat restoration and invasive species removal are all delivered. Other initiatives include deployment of citizen scientists, seed guardian networks and knowledge-sharing by young farmers.

Building the evidence for action and identifying innovative ideas and approaches is achieved with philanthropic funding supporting research, networking and dissemination activities.

From changing farming habits, to protecting and promoting endangered species to protecting our precious habitats; pioneering efforts are underway to ensure on a wider scale we save our nature and our landscapes for generations to come.


## Salmon Watch Ireland - Building Awareness & Engagement

Salmon Watch Ireland champions the protection of Ireland's wild Atlantic shoals through science-based advocacy, community engagement, and policy reform. Significant grant support from the Farmleigh Fund at the Community Foundation facilitated key achievements:

- Saving the Irish Salmon – A Policy Statement 2025
- Hosting a National Salmon Conference
- Legal challenges to salmon farming licences
- Advocacy for pollution monitoring and enforcement
- Expanding outreach through digital resources, workshops, and youth engagement.

***“This funding has been a game-changer as it has supported scaling up operations, building organisational capacity, and reaching thousands more people with its message.”***

## ReFarm Ireland

A man in a green jacket and blue jeans is seen from behind, herding a group of cows in a grassy field. The cows are of various colors, including brown and tan. The background shows a rolling landscape under a cloudy sky.

ReFarm pioneers nature-positive farming by leveraging private finance. Online training, briefing materials, and direct engagement encourages hedges and native trees, ponds, species-rich grasslands as well as nesting spaces for bats and swifts. The ReFarm Burren pilot works with 15-farmers following sustainable practices such as seasonal cattle herding (pictured) as well as innovative “virtual fencing” technology creating more space for nature.

Burren Cattle Drive, photo from Clare County Council.

## Place-based Initiatives

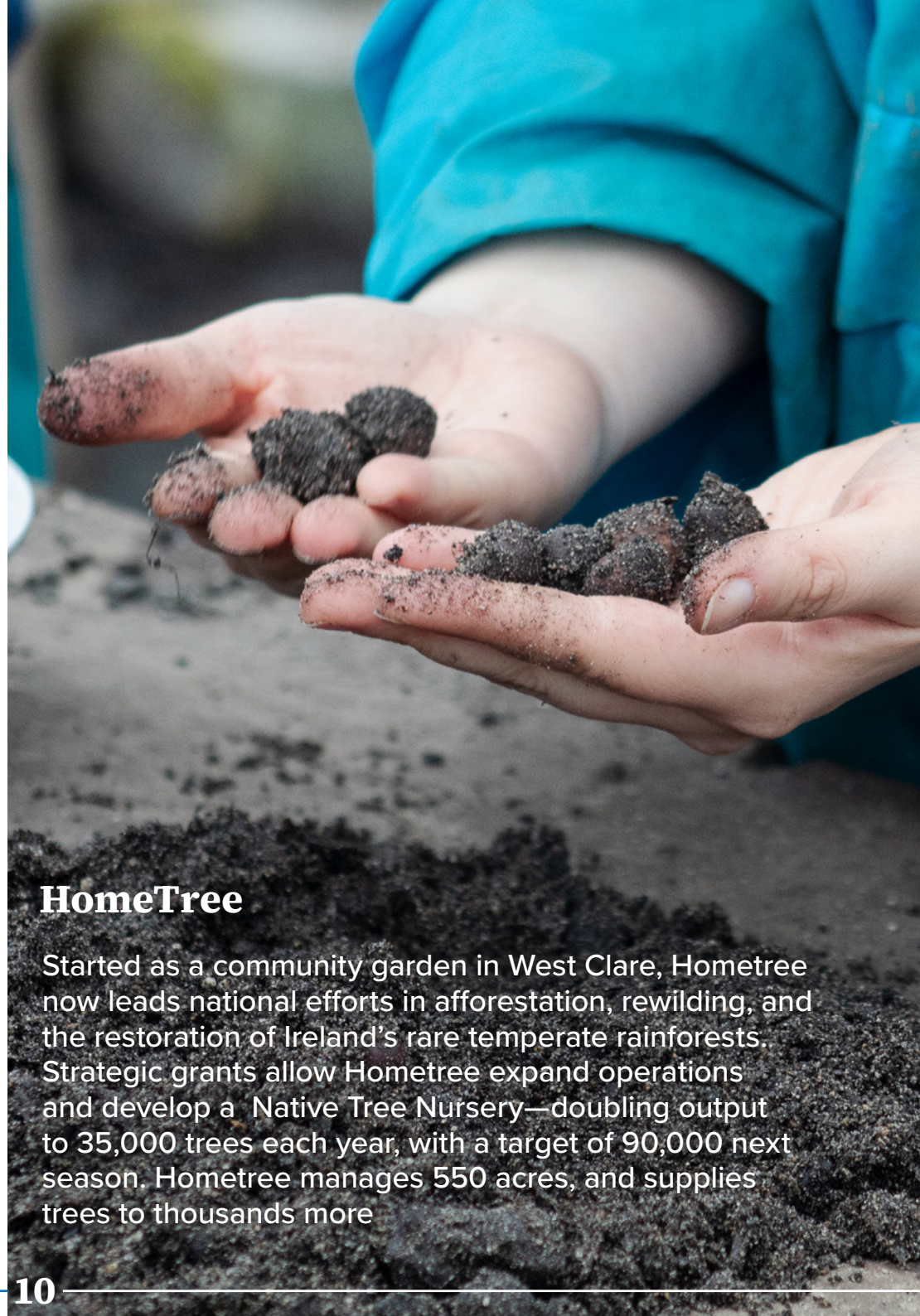
A sense of place is a central motivator within Irish philanthropy. The Mayo Sustainability Fund is a place based model developed so others may follow.

Informed by a scoping study and community consultation commissioned by Community Foundation Ireland in partnership with the Sunflower Charitable Foundation, the Mayo fund responds to the needs of local sustainability-focused groups.

Support allows projects including wetland ponds reducing agricultural runoff, plans to address coastal erosion on Inishturk and Clare Islands, protecting Croagh Patrick's fragile ecosystem as well as endangered birds, and training to rescue beached dolphins.

Similarly, Burrenbeo Trust connects people to their unique local environment through education, conservation, and community engagement. Guided walks, festivals, school initiatives and biodiversity projects and foster stewardship and sustainability.

With philanthropic support a Heritage Keepers programme supports schools and communities to explore local heritage and take action, a programme which now enjoys a reach to children nationwide.



### HomeTree

Started as a community garden in West Clare, Hometree now leads national efforts in afforestation, rewilding, and the restoration of Ireland's rare temperate rainforests. Strategic grants allow Hometree expand operations and develop a Native Tree Nursery—doubling output to 35,000 trees each year, with a target of 90,000 next season. Hometree manages 550 acres, and supplies trees to thousands more



# Support Biodiversity Action

The Burren National Park. Photo Clare County Council

## How Your Philanthropy Can Protect Biodiversity

Your philanthropic donations can support action to protect biodiversity and our planet. The team in Community Foundation Ireland have the expertise, experience and community connectivity to channel donor's generosity into strategic, community-led initiatives.

Through an existing or new fund, as an individual, family, corporate partner, or advisor, together we can create tangible change — both now and for generations to come.

### 1. Fund High-Impact Grant Opportunities:

Community Foundation Ireland provides donors with strategic philanthropic opportunities and advice, to ensure that all donations are directed to biodiversity charities or grassroots organisations to support key initiatives. This may be to support projects directly or support the capacity of an organisation to strengthen and bolster the environmental sector.

### 2. Demonstrate Results:

We provide our donors with regular reporting and shared learnings so together we can scale what works.



### 3. Ensure Equity:

In line with our equality mission, we commit to prioritising communities most impacted by environmental challenges.

#### There are many ways donors can give:

- **Donor-Advised Fund:**

Personalise your giving strategy by setting up a fund to direct your donations.

- **Endowment Fund:**

Donate to the Community Foundation Ireland Endowment Fund, or set up your own, to ensure that your grant-making can happen now and into the future.

- **Legacy Pledge:**

A gift in your will to Community Foundation Ireland could support environmental progress for generations to come.



# Together, We Can Achieve More

## About Us

Community Foundation Ireland has a clear mission. Our team is dedicated to building an equal and better future. We provide a trusted source of expertise and knowledge for individuals, families and organisations who are looking to maximise the impact of philanthropic donations and have a positive impact through their giving.

## Get in Touch

Let's start a conversation today. Contact us to learn more about Community Foundation and how your support can make a meaningful difference in communities all over Ireland.

You can call us on +353 (0)1 8747354 or email us in the Development Team.

**For change. For better. For all.**

# Community Foundation Ireland

30 Merrion Square North,  
Dublin 2, D02 VE40

Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20044886  
Company Registration No: 338427  
Charity No: CHY 13967

Tel: +353 (1) 874 7354

[giving@foundation.ie](mailto:giving@foundation.ie)

[www.communityfoundation.ie](http://www.communityfoundation.ie)

[community-foundation-ireland/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/community-foundation-ireland/)

[CommunityFoundationIreland](https://www.facebook.com/CommunityFoundationIreland)

[communityfoundationireland](https://www.instagram.com/communityfoundationireland)

[@CommunityFoundationIreland](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCommunityFoundationIreland)



**Jackie Harrison**  
[Jharrison@foundation.ie](mailto:Jharrison@foundation.ie)



**Julie Jones**  
[JJones@foundation.ie](mailto:JJones@foundation.ie)



**John Sansome**  
[JSansome@foundation.ie](mailto:JSansome@foundation.ie)