

## Case study

### SPECIES RECOVERY AND CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT – A learning and networking experience



The Mussel breeding facility at Ballinderry Rivers Trust

#### When

June 2024

#### Where

Ballinderry, Ireland

#### Background

Mid summer is busy time for the LIFE project with lots of fieldwork for SCRT on river restoration sites, farmers visits for catchment engagement officer at NE, mussel drop off collections at the FBA and eDNA sampling for WCC for NE and EA staff. In the middle of this busy season we found time for the next knowledge exchange trip.

A visit to Ballinderry rivers trust in Northern Ireland was organised, and made into an adventure by the team taking the overnight ferry from Liverpool to Belfast.

Ballinderry Rivers trust have hosted a Freshwater pearl mussel breeding programme for 30 years. The Ballinderry river supports Freshwater pearl mussels as well as white-clawed Crayfish and salmon and trout. This similarity meant the LIFE project could learn from work the trust has been doing over the years.

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### What we did

We had a warm welcome by from Rachel McEldowney farming officer, Frank Mitchell and Peter Mitchell, who run the breeding and mussel reinforcement programme. After morning talks to give us an introduction, we had a tour of the mussel facility, climbing all the way up the gorge to the large tanks which mimic a river environment.

This was followed by a visit to the mussel reinforcement site, with beds of ranunculus sitting next to where the mussels are thriving. This was fantastic to see and great to have hands on experience and see habitat restoration in place.

### Biosecurity

Any kit we brought to Northern Ireland had been meticulously cleaned prior to travel and disinfected before starting on site. NI does not have Signal crayfish and so as ever we needed to make sure biosecurity was of the highest standard.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> day started with a talk by Mark Horton and Rachel to hear about the trust and the farming measures which have been implemented. Ballinderry river flows into Lough Neagh which provides drinking water for some of Northern Ireland. Pressures from intensive agriculture and run off play a major part of the impacts on the lake which the trust works to address. We also visited a farmyard where clean and dirty water separation had been put in place to reduce diffuse pollution from runoff. Other challenges that had been overcome included getting water up a steep bank and showing that Solar powered drinking troughs can be installed a long distance from the river.

### Outcomes and Learning

The visit was a great opportunity to talk to staff of Ballinderry rivers trust and share our experience and ideas. Both catchments share similar pressures and work to restore habitat to the same species and these opportunities to share learning and knowledge help the future work of protecting our rivers and their species.

It is always fascinating to see how different mussel breeding facilities have been set up and evolved over time, each one individual and unique in how it has addressed different challenges – seeing alternative systems set up always helps to inform future mitigation to issues if they arise, or provide ideas for alternative breeding set-ups.

### Next steps

The agricultural payments in Northern Ireland are administered directly via the Rivers Trusts, allowing a unique influence on Land Management practices. While this may not appear to be instantly replicable within England due to the difference in Land Management scheme mechanisms, there is a potential replication through the new Landscape Recovery Projects, where learning can be applied during the development phases on how to reconcile sensitive catchment management and productive land use when forming a new workable payment structure.

### Contact us

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Ranunculus beds