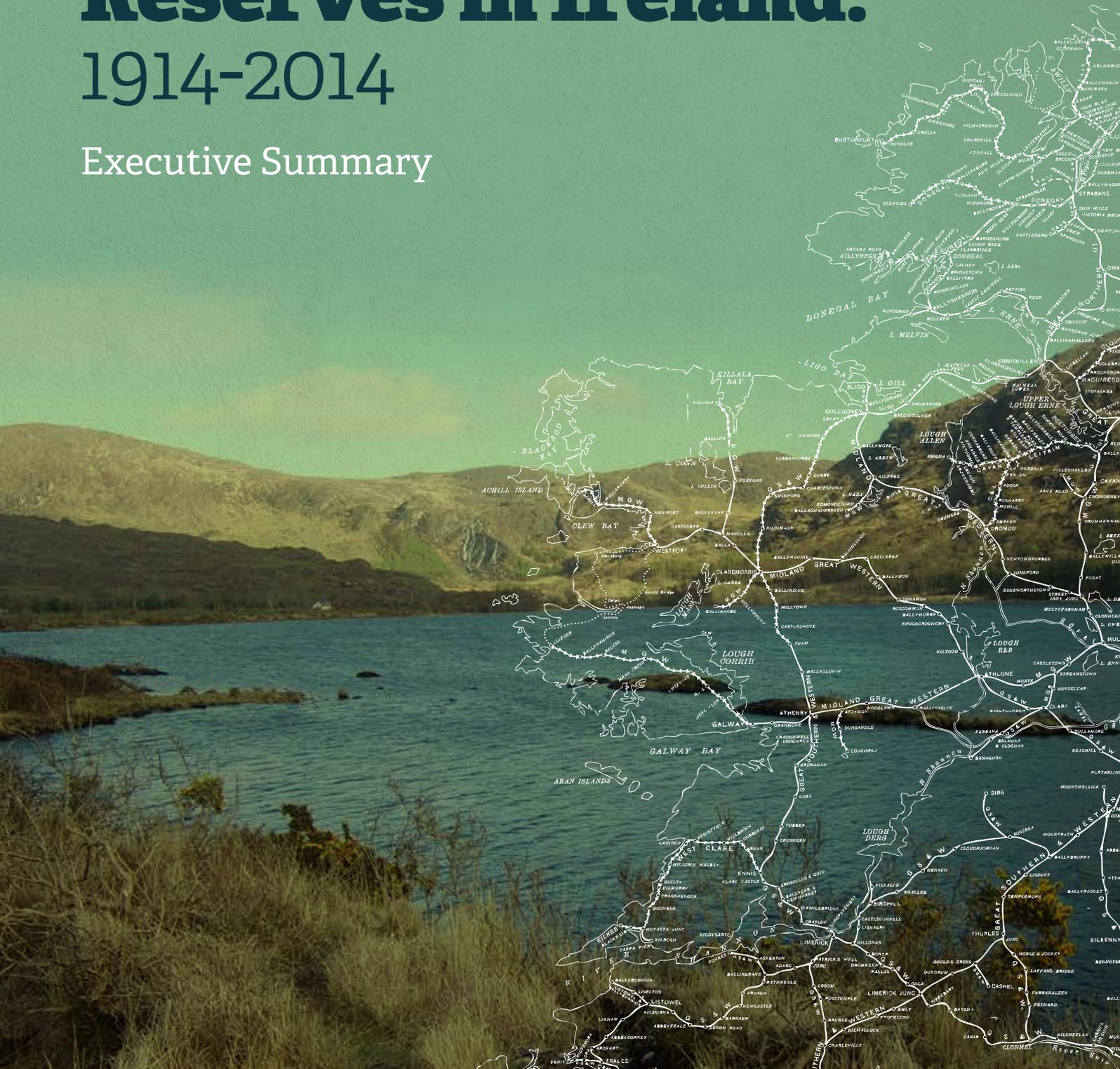


The Rothschild Reserves in Ireland: 1914-2014

Executive Summary



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Introduction

Founded in 1912 by the banker and naturalist Charles Rothschild, the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (SPNR) set out to identify wildlife areas in Britain and Ireland worthy of preservation and to encourage others to acquire these sites and look after them. The SPNR eventually became The Wildlife Trusts in the UK which celebrated its centenary in 2012.

The approach to nature conservation proposed by Rothschild, conserving not only individual species of plants and animals but also the habitats on which they depended, represented a new and more scientific and habitat-based attitude to wildlife conservation than was conventional at the time. Rothschild's ideas were ahead of his time and this approach did not become mainstream within the nature movement for many years. The Society's main aim was "to urge by means of the press, by personal efforts and by correspondence with local societies and individuals the desirability of preserving in perpetuity sites suitable for nature reserves".

Once established, one of the Society's first tasks was to prepare a list of important wildlife sites in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Rothschild coordinated this work himself, writing to local natural history clubs and societies asking them to supply information about potential sites. He talked at public meetings, visited and negotiated over sites as well as despatching others, to all parts of the British Isles. George Druce, for example, visited County Kerry in 1914 "to check out an estate at Clooney on Kenmare Bay belonging to the Marquis of Lansdowne."

The aim of the study

The Society published a list of 284 sites of wildlife importance in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland in 1915 – the so-called 'Rothschild Reserves'. Seventeen sites on the SPNR list were in Ireland and these are the focus of this report, which was commissioned by The Wildlife Trusts and funded by the Carnegie UK Trust. The key aim of the study is to stimulate interest in the history, and the future of nature conservation in Ireland. (1914 is the earliest recorded date for SPNR field surveys in Ireland and for this reason our report analyses the fortunes of these sites over a 100 year timeframe 1914-2014.)

Methodology

The project was undertaken in two phases.

Phase 1 involved a desk based study which:

- Provided an overview of nature conservation in Ireland.
- Compiled a file on each site including the boundary proposed by the SPNR, reasons for inclusion on Rothschild's list, current site condition and designations, key habitats and species, threats and opportunities and any interesting stories or anecdotes.
- Produced maps for each site showing present boundaries and protective designations alongside the original SPNR maps.

Phase 2 comprised a site survey which:

- Established site boundaries, land uses and the landscape character of the area.
- Gathered limited on-site evidence of the ecological condition of habitats and key species the sites were originally noted for.
- Gathered on-site evidence of present management, as well as other factors driving change while noting any particularly damaging activities.

Work on the project was overseen by a reference group comprising An Taisce, the Irish Wildlife Trust, Centre for Planning Education and Research University College Cork, the Carnegie UK Trust and The Wildlife Trusts. Reports were also circulated to others with an interest and expertise in Ireland's wildlife.



Charles Rothschild – founder of the SPNR

Policy context: nature conservation in Ireland

The publication of the SPNR's list of proposed reserves in 1915 was a notable event in the history of Irish nature conservation but it was more than a decade before significant progress was made in the protection of any of the sites identified. The first sites to receive protection were North Bull Nature Reserve in Dublin Bay (established under the Wild Birds Act in 1930) and the Killarney Lakes which was gifted to the state and subsequently designated as a national park in 1932.

However, it wasn't until the 1970s and 1980s that comprehensive schedules were compiled of outstanding landscapes and areas of scientific interest in Ireland. Today, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has responsibility for protecting wildlife alongside several charitable and local organisations, and there are a number of key national and European protective designations. At a national level there are Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and Proposed NHAs, Nature Reserves and National Parks whilst the principal European designations are Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Birds Directive and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive. Despite these designations many of the protected habitats are described in recent reports by government agencies as being in poor condition. All sites described as SACs in the report are currently 'candidate' SACs pending formal designation by statutory instrument.

“Work on the project was overseen by a reference group comprising An Taisce, The Irish Wildlife Trust, Centre for Planning Education and Research University College Cork, Carnegie Trust and The Wildlife Trusts”

1 Sands, T. (2012) *Wildlife in Trust*. Elliott & Thompson, p.2

2 Sands, T. (2012) *Wildlife in Trust*. Elliott & Thompson, p.6

The Rothschild Reserves: proposed Irish sites

In 1915, the SPNR drafted an initial list of 20 areas of wildlife importance in Ireland (which included sites in what is now Northern Ireland). This list (see format below) was subsequently refined to 17 sites and all of those sites in the Republic of Ireland remained on the final list of proposed nature reserves.

N°	Site Name (from SPNR)
213	Brandon Mountain, Co. Kerry
228	Benbulbin (SW side), Co. Sligo
210	Burren, nr. Ballyvaughan (great botanical interest)*
88	Cloonee, Co. Kerry
214	Gap of Dunloe, Co. Kerry
212	Errisbeg, nr Roundstone, Co. Galway*
215	Lake of Killarney and surrounding, Co. Kerry (scenery and botanical interest)
208	Shores of Lough Neagh, Co. Antrim (rare plants)
212	Lough Nagraiguebeg, Co Galway (Lusitanian Flora)*
211	North Bull, Dublin
217	The Raven, Co. Wexford
216	Rostonstown Burrow, Co. Wexford
209	Cliffs at White Park Bay, Co. Antrim
218	Sand Dunes near Wicklow, Co. Wicklow
80,80a, 80b	Ahascragh Bog, Co. Galway (of general and botanical interest)*
83	Killucan Bog, nr Mullingar, Co Westmeath (of general and botanical interest)*
81	Mowhill Bog, Co. Leitrim (of general and botanical interest)*
82a	Bogs near River Shannon, Co. Galway (of general and botanical interest)*
N°	Areas of Secondary Importance
10	Saltee Islands, Co. Wexford (breeding-place of birds)
55	Area South of Kenmare River, Co. Kerry

Table of 'Rothschild Reserves' in Ireland

Correspondence suggests that most sites were selected on the basis of recommendation by naturalists and landowners. Survey forms give reasons for inclusion in the list but this is often for general reasons such as representing 'typical primeval country'. However, for some of the sites more detail was provided, for example, on notable species which had been found there. The SPNR also organised some field surveys

The 17 sites in Ireland represent a variety of habitat types although as Cabot points out, with a bias towards 'bogs, salt marshes, shingle beaches and sand dunes'³, which the SPNR considered the most characteristic types of wild country in Ireland. Five of the sites were referred to as bogs and these are the sites which have suffered greatest damage in the intervening years. The 'bog bordering the Shannon at Shannon Harbour' has been almost entirely cut away, and parts of three other peatland sites have suffered significant damage.

Today, 13 of the 17 sites have some variety of national heritage designation and 12 are also covered by European conservation designations. The sites without protective designations are the 'bog bordering the Shannon', which has already been largely destroyed and 'bogs near Mohill and Killucan' which have been partly damaged. It has not been possible to definitively locate one other site, that 'South of Kenmare River, County Kerry'.

“Five of the sites were referred to as bogs and these are the sites which have suffered greatest damage in the intervening years”

3 Cabot, D. (1999) *Ireland*. The New Naturalist series, HarperCollins London, p.433

The Rothschild sites today



Bogs about Ahascragh, County Galway

Several bogs near Ahascragh in Co. Galway were proposed as SPNR nature reserves. These occur in three main locations, Killure, Annaghbeg and Derryfadda. The areas were proposed on account of their representation of 'typical primeval country' and for the moths *Eupitheca logata*, *Melitaea aurinea* as well as species of *Eriophoria* (Bog cotton), a variety of which, *E. vaginatum*, is reported by the National Parks and Wildlife Service to be currently present on the site. The bogs in two areas (Killure and Annaghbeg) remain today, and are NHAs, while the third, Derryfadda, has been industrially harvested for peat. Both of the NHA sites are threatened by turf cutting and afforestation.



Ben Bulbin, County Sligo/Leitrim

The SPNR site occurs on the south-west side of Ben Bulbin, West of Glen Car, County Sligo. It contains the famous summit and cliffs of Ben Bulbin (526m), located at the northern tip. In the original survey, the site was recorded as a piece of typical primeval country and of notable importance for plants such as *Arenaria ciliata* and *Polygala babingtonii*. Today the site has SAC and pNHA designations, whilst the steeper slopes and cliff habitats around the perimeter have SPA status. It is particularly noted for its arctic-alpine species and is largely intact. There are no significant threats to the site, perhaps partly as restricted access reduces human impacts on the site's wildlife.



Mount Brandon, County Kerry

Mount Brandon lies in the north of County Kerry, in the south west of Ireland, close to the northern coast of the Dingle peninsula. Overlooking Brandon Bay, it is the second highest mountain in Ireland at 920m. The mountain contains several steep cliffs and a relatively flat plateau, with several lakes on lower ground to the east. The SPNR documents do not give any reasons for the site's inclusion on the list, nor do they mention any particular species. Key habitats present today include alpine and boreal heaths, lakes and inland cliffs. The site is largely intact and is currently covered by European designations. Threats to the lower slopes are posed by overgrazing, burning and afforestation.



Cloonee Valley, County Kerry

The remote Cloonee Valley lies in Co. Kerry, to the south of the River Kenmare estuary. It was proposed for preservation by the SPNR on account of its beauty, and also its flora and fauna, in particular the Strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*). Key habitats on site include a chain of several (oligotrophic) lakes as well as Uragh Wood, an ancient oak woodland. The site is intact and is designated as an SAC and pNHA. *Arbutus unedo* is recorded as present on site by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Threats include coniferous afforestation and deer overgrazing.



Errisbeg and Nagraiguebeg, County Galway

Errisbeg lies on the south coast of Co. Galway in the west of Ireland, and Lough Nagraiguebeg lies in the bogland to the north. The main habitats at the sites proposed for preservation by the SPNR are wet and dry heaths on Errisbeg, and lowland atlantic blanket bog and lake habitats in the area around Lough Nagraiguebeg. The site is noted for its Lusitanian flora. Species identified by the SPNR were *Erica mackiana* and *Erica mediterranea* (both observed on a contemporary site visit), *Arabis ciliatus*, *Najas flexilis*, and *Castalia alba occidentali*. Both sites are largely intact and are protected by European designations. Bog and heath burning and some overgrazing are potential threats to both sites.



Gap of Dunloe, County Kerry

The Gap of Dunloe was proposed as an SPNR nature reserve for its general scenic and botanical interest. There is little official data specific to this site as it falls within the larger SAC and pNHA of the Killarney National Park and McGillycuddy Reeks, although the Gap itself lies just outside the National Park boundary. The SPNR boundary stretches along a narrow gap running approximately 11km in length, and which runs in a north-south direction. It is an example of a glacially breached watershed dominated by blanket bog and open water habitats. There are no particular threats identified for this site which is largely intact.

Area South of the Kenmare River

The list of provisional SPNR reserves names an 'Area South of the Kenmare River'. Correspondence in the SPNR's Kenmare (River) file (55) contains a letter from Mr Richard Barrington which describes this site as 'about 2000 acres and to the south of the Kenmare River and east of Derreen'. From reading the Cloonee Valley file, this corresponds to the Cloonee site in both location and in acreage (Cloonee was 2130), and is also owned by Lord Lansdowne. The Cloonee Valley lies to the south of the Kenmare River, which is the name of the estuary. It seems possible that the SPNR site 55 (Kenmare River) was a precursor to site 88 (Cloonee Valley), as the site described seems very similar.



Lake of Killarney and surroundings, County Kerry

The Upper Lake and surroundings were identified as the main area of interest in the survey of Killarney, although the SPNR map also included the nearby Muckross Lake and surroundings to the north. It is recorded for its 'very lovely scenery of botanical interest', but there is no reference to any particular habitats and species. The site is one of the most extensive of the Rothschild Reserves and today forms a large part of the Killarney National Park which is over 10,289ha in its entirety. As well as a National Park, the site is also designated an SAC, a pNHA and part of it is an SPA. There are no acute threats facing the site due to the stringent management plan in operation. However there are some issues facing the entire park where the most vulnerable habitats are the woodlands (sensitive to overgrazing and the invasive spread of *Rhododendron ponticum*) and bogs (sensitive to grazing, burning, turbarry and afforestation).



Bogs near Killucan, County Westmeath

The SPNR proposed that three main areas of bog in Co. Westmeath, be protected on account of their peatland habitats. The bogs were noted for the presence of the Marsh Ringlet butterfly *Coenonympha typhon*, as well as being representative of 'typical primeval country'. Bog cotton (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) was also noted in this area and was observed on the site visit. None of the sites are currently protected by European or national designations. Of the three main areas of bog, two appear partly intact while one area appears to be partly afforested and partly converted to agriculturally improved grassland.



Bogs near Mohill, County Leitrim

Four bogs near Mohill in Co. Leitrim were also proposed as nature reserves on account of the presence of the rare Marsh Ringlet butterfly *Coenonympha typhoon*, and Bog cotton (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), as well as for their representation of 'typical primeval country'. Both species were observed during the site visit. Of the four bogs, one is largely intact, two are partially intact, having been affected by turf cutting and afforestation, and the remaining site is heavily forested. None are protected by national or European designations.



North Bull, Dublin Bay

North Bull or Bull was proposed as a nature reserve by the SPNR, but without any site description. The island is a unique landform on the east coast of Ireland, close to Dublin city. It covers an area of around 1944ha and is still growing. It accommodates a diverse range of coastal habitats, including mud and sand flats, lagoons, salt marshes, sand dunes, beaches and grassland, and is particularly noted for its birdlife. The site holds more protective designations than any other site in the report. Along with SAC, SPA, and pNHA designations, it is also a Nature Reserve, a RAMSAR wetland site, UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve, Public Open Space/Park, Bird Sanctuary and Special Amenity Area. While there are no acute threats, managing recreational pressures such as dog walking, fly tipping and invasive plant species are a priority on the island.



Raven's Point, County Wexford

Whilst the Raven's Point or 'The Raven' in Wexford Harbour, was identified as a proposed reserve, no information is provided other than land ownership at the time. The site is dominated by coastal dune and coniferous woodland habitats and covers an area of 589ha. It is designated as a Nature Reserve, SAC, SPA and pNHA and is an important area for rare flora and fauna including species of national importance that have elsewhere disappeared. It also forms part of the larger Wexford Wildfowl Reserve. Despite the ongoing management measures to conserve the site's habitats and species, the reserve has been facing significant problems of anti-social behaviour and high levels of littering in the woods and on the dunes.



Rostonstown Burrow (Lady's Island Lake), County Wexford

The sand and shingle barrier at Rostonstown's Burrow (Lady's Island Lake), Wexford was identified as a potential SPNR nature reserve. The site is a 200m long spit which is continually breached and supports a rich variety of plant species. Its existence gives rise to a brackish lake just inside the coastline, which is home to an important breeding population of terns. Today the site is protected as an SAC, SPA and IBA (Important Bird Area). The lake area adjacent to the SPNR site covers about 450ha. Potential threats to the site include the periodic breaching of the barrier which can affect wildlife, as well as horse riding and motor cycling.



Saltee Islands County Wexford

Great Saltee and Little Saltee, two small islands off the coast of Wexford, were together identified as a proposed SPNR reserve. They are noted as a 'wonderful breeding place for seabirds' and a locality for scarce plants, but with no additional details. The site has the most impressive bird population of all the sites, with massive breeding colonies of a large variety of seabirds. The islands are presently uninhabited, but a bird observatory exists on Great Saltee. Today the islands are designated as an SAC, SPA and pNHA and they cover an area of 120ha. Together they form one of Ireland's most famous bird sanctuaries.



Bogs bordering the Shannon at Shannon Harbour

The SPNR proposed that the bog bordering the River Shannon, at the junction between the River Shannon and Grand Canal, be protected as a 'typical example of primeval country' and a 'breeding place of scarce creatures'. While there is no exact site boundary, the majority of the peatland habitat in this location has been industrially harvested and has been largely destroyed. Adjacent to the site are the Shannon Callows SAC and SPA which are seasonally flooded grassland habitats, protected under European conservation designations. As the bog habitat no longer exists, much of the site data relates to these areas. Threats to the Shannon Callows include agricultural intensification and summer flooding which can affect bird populations.



The Burren near Ballyvaughan, County Clare

Three sites within the Burren, an extensive area of limestone pavement in the west of Ireland, were proposed as nature reserves on account of their 'great botanical interest'. The sites lie in northwest Co. Clare, near the village of Ballyvaughan, which lies on the southern shore of Galway Bay. The habitats proposed for preservation by the SPNR include an extensive area (almost 270ha) of coastal limestone pavement, near Black Head, as well as sand dunes, a river with tufa formation and a turlough site (temporary lake). Two of the sites are now designated under European Habitats Directives as SACs. The third site, a small area of limestone pavement, is partially intact and not designated. The main threats to the sites are recreational pressures, agricultural intensification and overgrazing.



Wicklow Sand Dunes (Magherabeg), County Wicklow

The Magherabeg Dunes on the Wicklow Coast were identified by the SPNR as a proposed nature reserve. The site documentation lacks detail on the reasons for its inclusion on Rothschild's list, yet the map delineates a clearly defined site with a border to the edges of the dunes. Today, the site has SAC and pNHA designations and a conservation plan. Wildlife interest lies primarily with the dune systems and petrifying springs. The site covers an area of around 74ha. The site identified by the SPNR appears largely intact. While there are some potential management issues, threats are reduced by limited access.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study recognises the foresight of Charles Rothschild and the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (SPNR) in identifying some of what are still today the most iconic landscapes and wildlife habitats in Ireland, places such as the Killarney Lakes, the Burren, Connemara, Ben Bulbin, and Mount Brandon. Our study has shown that a majority of these sites have subsequently been protected and survived largely intact. Only one of the sites on the SPNR list (a bog near the River Shannon) has been entirely lost (due to industrial peat harvesting), although three other sites (principally bogs) have lost some habitat. This compares favourably with the situation in England where a similar study carried out by Miriam Rothschild (Charles Rothschild's daughter) and Peter Marren in the 1990's found that over half of English sites on Rothschild's list had suffered serious habitat loss.

This report provides a snapshot in time of the status of the Rothschild sites with the best records, knowledge and data available to us. It is perhaps not as thorough as we would like it to be, but, overall, it is encouraging that nearly all of the sites still exist today. The data allows us to determine 'what next' for the Rothschild Reserves. We can look to one site specifically, the Burren, as an exemplar of future site and landscape management options and opportunities and to the Irish National Biodiversity Plan (2011-2016), which if implemented fully, could deliver positive long term outcomes for nature in Ireland and the wider issues of ecosystem health and function at a landscape scale.

We note that the SPNR sites are perhaps not altogether representative of important present day landscapes and wildlife habitats in Ireland. As Cabot points out the main focus of the list was on the "bogs, salt marshes, shingle beaches and sand dunes [which] were the most characteristic types of wild country in Ireland and had no exact counterpart on the continent"⁴. In this sense woodland, marine, grasslands, lakes and rivers habitats were perhaps considered less worthy of preservation, than they are today. And this perhaps accounts for what those with an interest in Irish wildlife might consider to be omissions from the list, sites such as the woodlands at Glengarriff and the unique marine ecosystem of Lough Ine, both in County Cork. Nevertheless, as Cabot acknowledges the SPNR list was a 'milestone in history of Irish Nature Conservation' which 'set an important foundation for future development'⁵ as amply illustrated by our study.

We must also add a note of caution to any impression that might have been given that all is well with the majority of sites on the SPNR list. In addition to the site near the River Shannon that has been lost entirely, three other sites have lost important habitat and the remaining parts of two of these (bogs at Killucan and Mohill) do not benefit from any protective designations. We note that the SPNR sites that have suffered most damage have been peatlands, despite the international importance of these habitats. Ireland's raised bogs are national treasures – a fundamentally important part of the country's natural heritage and landscape. However 86% of Ireland's raised bogs have been lost, and it is estimated that between 2% and 4% of the remaining active area continues to be lost annually. It is estimated that the carbon emitted annually from degraded bogs in Ireland is broadly equivalent to Ireland's annual emissions from cars. The re-wetting and restoration of bogs has the capacity to secure existing carbon stocks and re-initiate the carbon storing ability of degraded bogs.

Peatland restoration is an important mechanism for countries such as Ireland to meet its national greenhouse gas targets and contribute towards tackling climate change. The Irish habitats that are most threatened by climate change include many that are found on the SPNR list. On the Rothschild list the bogs, coastal habitats and montane ecosystems which contain arctic-alpine plant communities at the southernmost point of their distribution range are the most likely to suffer the negative impacts of climate change first. Similarly the poor condition of peatland habitats will be exacerbated by drier summers and the encroachment of vascular plants which will cause further water loss.

A further reason for caution is that until the Government fulfils its obligations under the European Habitats Directive and Candidate SACs (Special Areas for Conservation) become full SACs, some sites will continue to exist without management plans. Similarly the vast majority of NHAs in Ireland, including several on the SPNR list, are still 'proposed' rather than fully designated NHAs which substantially weakens their status in the face of any threats.

The future of the SPNR sites cannot be considered in isolation of the wider countryside that surrounds them, and in many ways, their future depends on how the adjoining land and landscapes are managed. We accept that biodiversity protection must afford special attention, but to ensure site safeguard we must look to rebuilding robust and resilient ecosystems, and this means working at a landscape level. At this scale, we can start to address many of the detrimental land management practices and threats that these sites still face like overgrazing, drainage and forestation that lead to habitat degradation, fragmentation and loss.

It is possible to achieve productive agricultural systems and rebuild biodiversity. This is an evolving approach across the EU called high nature value farming. One of the sites selected by the SPNR – the Burren - has followed this model of thinking through the Burren Farming for Conservation Programme. This is a new agri-environment scheme targeting the Burren area on land that is not necessarily designated for conservation. One hundred and seventeen Burren farmers have been selected to take part in the scheme based on environmental criteria of their holdings. At this kind of scale and sympathetic management, rebuilding biodiversity and ecosystems is possible.

With regards to the future survival of these sites, we can perhaps look to Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan 2011-16. On the face of it, halting further biodiversity loss, planning for the protection, conservation and sustainable recovery of biodiversity and the acknowledgement of the intrinsic, social and economic value and benefits of biodiversity and associated ecosystems, appear to be onward organising principles for underpinning government duties and responsibilities.

However the scale of the challenge is reflected in a recent report on the state of Ireland's habitats, carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, which highlighted the degraded status of many key habitats such as bogs, coastal dunes and upland heaths. Of the 58 habitats assessed only five are considered to be in 'good' condition. Up to a third of all species assessed so far are threatened with extinction to one degree or another. The Food Harvest 2020 strategy which aims to increase agricultural productivity will put further pressure on habitats and species.

The goods and services provided by biodiversity are estimated to contribute a minimum of €2.6 billion per annum to the Irish economy. This natural capital is the foundation upon which our agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism sector depends and is vital for sustaining vital societal services such as crop pollination, carbon sequestration and climate regulation, the purification of water and air and flood control. This is not to mention the cultural and recreational benefits that are sustained by wild places and landscapes. A land-use strategy, incorporating sustainable farming alongside planning and habitat protection, could help to balance the competing demands on Ireland's wildlife and natural resources.

Irish wildlife and landscapes are under considerable pressure. We hope that this study will help raise awareness about the value of Irish wildlife and of the need to protect it from the many pressures that are identified in the individual site reports. The wellbeing of the sites, identified by the SPNR 100 years ago, could perhaps become a useful barometer of the state of nature in the country as a whole. We hope the next report on their status will be a positive one.

4 Cabot, D. (1999) *Ireland. The New Naturalist series*, HarperCollins London, p.433

5 *Ibid.* p.435

Recommendations

1. We recommend that our findings be used as a contribution towards continuing the debate and discussion on the status of nature and habitat condition in the Republic of Ireland today.
2. We would encourage the Irish Government to move quickly to fulfil its obligations under the European Habitats Directive to continue the process of designation as proposed in the Prioritised Action Framework for Natura 2000⁶ of sites designated as Special Areas for Conservation (SAC) and review the list of Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (with a view to giving many more full status) urgently whilst avoiding downgrading any existing NHAs.
3. We would also encourage the Irish Government to produce and publish conservation objectives and management plans for those sites on the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (SPNR) list currently without them, engaging with local communities in the process. We would welcome a full ecological condition assessment to be undertaken for the SPNR sites and a monitoring programme put in place thereafter to record habitat quality and collect species data.
4. We further encourage the Government to fulfil its obligations set out in the National Biodiversity Plan 2011-2016 and to invest more funds into the restoration, protection and conservation of biodiversity and associated ecosystems in and beyond protected sites.

5. We encourage the Government to use the CAP and Rural Development Programmes as opportunities for delivering biodiversity, ecosystems and landscape restoration, function and resilience. We support the development of high nature value farming partnerships and maximum funding being made available through the CAP to support agri-environment schemes and wildlife-friendly farming. The Rothschild sites could be used as the core zones of landscape restoration schemes.

6. We support work to restore and protect peatland habitats in Ireland. At a European scale Irish peatland is a habitat of significant importance and is a valuable part of the country's natural heritage. We support the Government in fulfilling its commitment to the cessation of peat-cutting on SACs.

Finally we welcome the fact that this report has provided an opportunity for voluntary groups in the Republic of Ireland to work together and to develop stronger links between wildlife conservation organisations in Ireland and the UK. We hope that this relationship will continue to grow and our work to restore wildlife in Ireland and the UK will benefit from this.

6 http://www.npws.ie/publications/archive/IE_PAF_draft_1.1_Jan2013.pdf