

## THE NEED FOR CAREFUL PLANNING, MANAGEMENT, AND CONSERVATION OF ROSCOMMON'S HEDGEROW RESOURCE

- ❑ Certain hedges need to be given extra emphasis for conservation purposes. For example **townland boundary hedges** and hedges that have high **species richness** should be safeguarded more stringently in roads, construction, and other developments.
- ❑ If hedgerow extent and quality are not to decline further, then the levels of hedgerow rejuvenation (**hedge laying, coppicing and infilling of gaps**) will need to increase significantly from those detected in the survey.
- ❑ Bulldozing ("Hi-macing") hedges has not been proven to be of long term benefit to hedges and is potentially very damaging. It should be strongly discouraged as a management practice.
- ❑ Cutting during the hedges' growing season can reduce the vigour of the plants that make up the hedge. The **bird nesting season** also runs from March 1st to August 31st. Not cutting during this period benefits hedges and their associated wildlife.
- ❑ Breasting hedges but allowing the top to grow freeform should be encouraged as a management technique that suits both the farm and wildlife. It is also well suited for the management of many roadside hedges.
- ❑ New hedges must be well looked after in the years after they are planted if they are to survive and grow. Any new planting should use **local, native plants**. Including species such as Spindle, Hazel, Crab Apple, and Guelder Rose to increase diversity will benefit wildlife conservation.
- ❑ Roadside trees will need to be routinely assessed for their potential hazard, so that risks can be dealt with constructively and the aesthetic and wildlife value of this important resource protected.

ROSCOMMON'S HEDGES ARE A WONDERFUL RESOURCE,  
LET'S KEEP IT THAT WAY!

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# COUNTY ROSCOMMON'S HEDGES

A summary of the work and findings of the County Roscommon Hedgerow Survey. An action of the County Roscommon Heritage Plan 2004-2008.



A copy of the full report is available from the Heritage Office of Roscommon County Council or on [www.roscommoncoco.ie](http://www.roscommoncoco.ie), e-mail [heritage@roscommoncoco.ie](mailto:heritage@roscommoncoco.ie), or phone 090 6637135. Also available from branches of Roscommon Library.



County Roscommon  
Heritage Forum



Fóram Oidhreachta  
Chontae Ros Comáin

SUPPORTED BY THE HERITAGE COUNCIL



LE CUIDIÚ AN CHOMHAIRLE OIDHREACHTA

## HISTORY

### THE HISTORY OF HEDGEROWS IN COUNTY ROSCOMMON

Hedgerows are a relatively recent feature in the Irish landscape although some raths dating from around 1000 AD were planted with blackthorn and hawthorn to support defense. Hedgerows did not become more widespread until medieval times, firstly to mark the boundaries of townlands and later, as stock-proof field boundaries. Most of the familiar patterns of the county's hedges were planted in the mid 1700's as part of the Agricultural improvements of that era. Roscommon's hedges have developed their own specific character and have become a distinctive feature of the county.

### THE VALUE OF HEDGES IN COUNTY ROSCOMMON

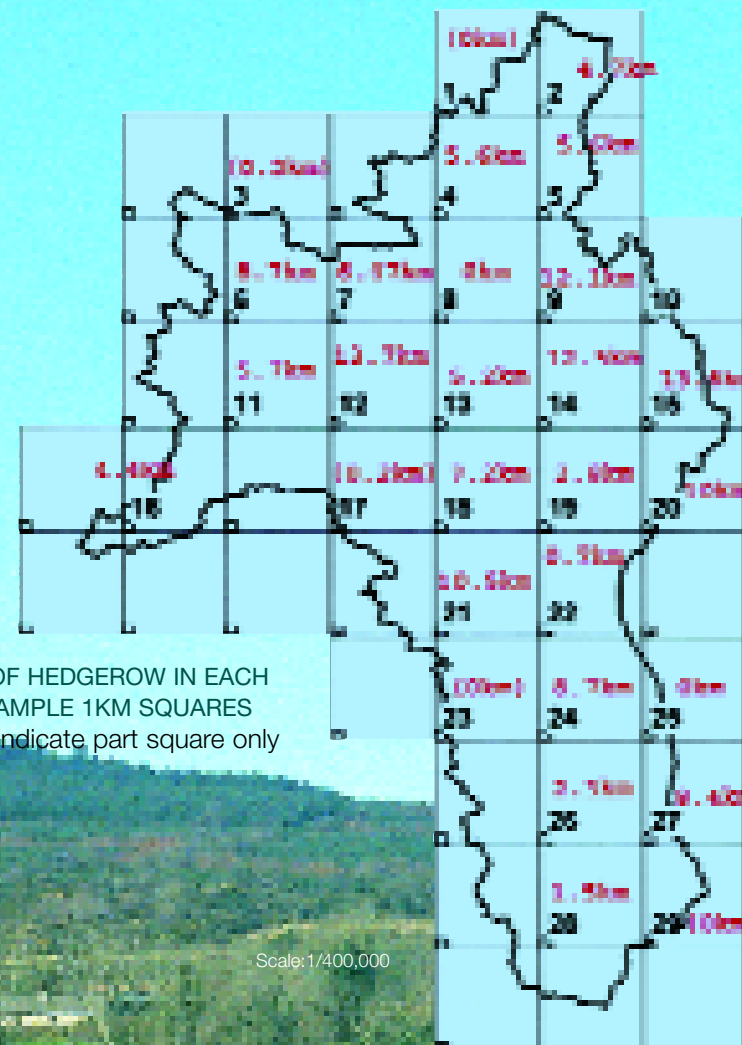
Roscommon's Hedges are a valuable asset to the County, adding much to the scenic appearance of the landscape and providing many services on the farm. The root systems of hedgerow trees and shrubs regulate water movement in the land and improve the quality of water. Hedgerows are also enormously important for wildlife. They are a habitat for insects like butterflies and bumblebees and provide food, shelter, and nesting sites for birds, from small songbirds to larger birds of prey like the Kestrel and Sparrowhawk. Mammals such as wood mice, hedgehogs, badgers, and bats also depend on hedges for their survival.

### THE ROSCOMMON HEDGEROW SURVEY

In 2004 Roscommon County Council in association with the Heritage Council carried out the County Hedgerow Survey as part of the County Roscommon Heritage Plan, 2004 - 2008. Along with a similar survey in Westmeath, these are the first of their kind in the Republic of Ireland and are a major step towards hedgerow conservation in these two counties.

A total of 29 sample squares were recorded, (24 full 1km<sup>2</sup> and 5 part squares on the county boundaries). The Survey has investigated the extent, floristic composition, structure, condition, and management of hedgerows in the county. Public consultations were held in order to gauge people's views and concerns about the hedges of their county. The information will benefit a wide range of end users in the county, from farmers and teachers to planners, decision makers and advisory bodies.

## THE EXTENT OF HEDGES IN COUNTY ROSCOMMON



The average length of hedge in a square kilometre in County Roscommon is 5.43 kilometres. There is an estimated 15,574 kilometres of hedgerow in the whole county. There is a further 2,165 km of remnant (the remains of) hedgerows in the county.

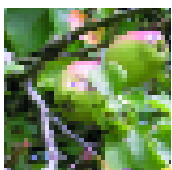
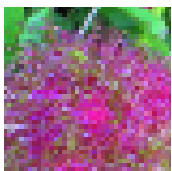
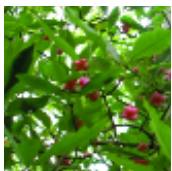
# THE FLORA OF ROSCOMMON'S HEDGEROWS



## WOODY SHRUB SPECIES

## % FREQUENCY

Hawthorn ( <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> )	99
Blackthorn ( <i>Prunus spinosa</i> )	53
Gorse ( <i>Ulex europaeus</i> )	27
Elder ( <i>Sambucus nigra</i> )	26
Privet ( <i>Ligustrum vulgare</i> )	24
Holly ( <i>Ilex aquifolium</i> )	20
Willow ( <i>Salix species</i> )	19
Spindle ( <i>Euonymus europaeus</i> )	12
Hazel ( <i>Corylus avellana</i> )	7
Guelder Rose ( <i>Viburnum opulus</i> )	3
Snowberry ( <i>Symphoricarpos rivularis</i> )	3
Beech ( <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> )	2
Sycamore ( <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> )	2
Crab Apple ( <i>Malus sylvestris</i> )	2
Elm ( <i>Ulmus glabra</i> )	<1
Damson ( <i>Prunus domestica</i> )	0.5



## THE FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE OF SHRUBBY SPECIES IN SAMPLED ROSCOMMON HEDGES.

(These figures do not include trees).

Roadside and townland boundary hedges were found to contain a greater diversity of native shrub species than other hedges. This is due to earlier establishment in the landscape as many roads date back to before the period of land enclosure.

## TREES

The most common hedgerow tree in County Roscommon by far is the Ash (found in over 60% of hedges). Willow comes in second (11%), followed by Sycamore (9%) and then Beech (8%); both non – native trees. Alder, Wild Cherry, Birch, Oak, Holly, Horse Chestnut, Crab Apple, and Rowan are also found.

# DISTRIBUTION OF HEDGE CLASSIFICATION TYPES IN CO. ROSCOMMON

## DISTRIBUTION OF HEDGE CLASSIFICATION TYPES ON CO. ROSCOMMON.

- Key
- Group 1 - Willow hedges
  - Group 2 - Species poor Hawthorn hedges
  - Group 3 - Hawthorn and Blackthorn
  - Group 4 - Species rich hedges
  - Group 5 - Gorse hedges



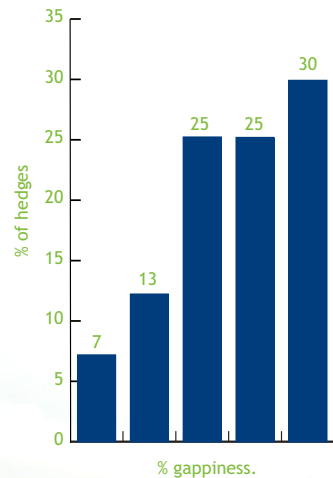
Scale: 1/400,000

The survey results enabled five main types (groups) of hedges to be identified across Roscommon. Most of the species rich group were found in the North East of the County.

## THE STRUCTURE AND CONDITION OF ROSCOMMON'S HEDGES

A large proportion of hedges in the county are structurally poor, with a total of 28% being either remnant (the remains of what was once a hedge) or derelict. Birds and other wildlife generally need dense hedges that are in good condition for shelter, protection from predators, and nesting sites. Without management intervention derelict hedges will become remnants in time. The majority of the county's hedges have a high proportion of gaps along their length, with almost a third of hedges containing more than 25% gaps.

% THE PROPORTION OF GAPS IN ROSCOMMON HEDGES.



THESE FIGURES ARE WARNING SIGNALS THAT A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF HEDGES IN THE COUNTY ARE UNDER THREAT FROM ABANDONMENT AND MAY BE LOST WITHOUT CAREFUL PLANNING AND INTERVENTION

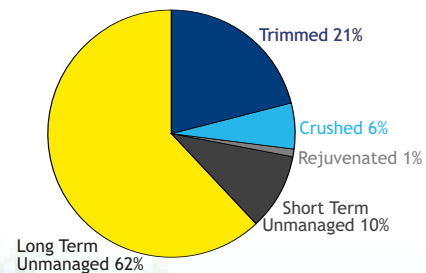
A HEDGE THAT HAS BECOME REMNANT THROUGH A LACK OF MANAGEMENT

## ROSCOMMON'S HEDGEROW MANAGEMENT

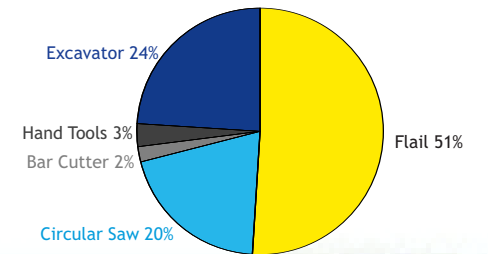
### HEDGEROW MANAGEMENT

82% of surveyed Roscommon hedges form part of active farm boundaries. Almost two-thirds of the hedges surveyed in the county were found to be long term unmanaged (over 10 years); many have not been managed for decades. Hedges generally need to be managed to maintain their viability. The proportion of hedges managed with excavator machines is very high. This management method is bad for the long term health of hedges.

A BREAKDOWN OF THE MANAGEMENT OF HEDGES



THE METHOD OF HEDGEROW MANAGEMENT IN COUNTY ROSCOMMON



HI-MAC HEDGE.  
'THE PROPORTION OF HEDGES MANAGED WITH EXCAVATOR MACHINES IS VERY HIGH. THIS MANAGEMENT METHOD IS BAD FOR THE LONG TERM HEALTH OF HEDGES'