

## Annual Report for the Year 2024

Annual reports should describe the changes that have taken place since the previous year in dynamic terms of management and function and not be limited to basic data. Any new text or map introducing a change in the situation of the area should be attached to the annual report.

**State:** Ireland

**Name of the area:** The Burren

**Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected**

**Areas:** 2024, 7 (EDPA adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 10 July 2013, renewed in 2017)

### Central authority concerned:

**Name:** The National Parks and Wildlife Service

**Address:** 90 King Street North, Dublin 7, Ireland.

**Tel:** 353-1888-2000 (Dr. Andy Bleasdale)

**Fax:** N/A

**e-mail:** [natureconservation@npws.gov.ie](mailto:natureconservation@npws.gov.ie) or [Andy.Bleasdale@npws.gov.ie](mailto:Andy.Bleasdale@npws.gov.ie)

**www:** [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie)

### Authority responsible for its management:

**Name:** High Nature Value Services Ltd (ACRES Burren Aran Co-Operation Project)

**Address:** Old Schoolhouse, Caron, Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland V95 KONA

**Tel:** 353-657089000

**Fax:** N/A

**e-mail:** [brendan@burrenlife.com](mailto:brendan@burrenlife.com)

**www:** [www.acresburrenaran.ie](http://www.acresburrenaran.ie)

**1. Conditions:** List here all conditions which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the conditions have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the conditions. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

**1. secure a budget from 2022 onwards for the development of a successor programme to the current Burren Programme; share with the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas the details of the successor programme to the current Burren Programme prior to its entry into force;**

The Burren Programme ended, as planned, in December 2022. Upon the commencement of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 2023, a new National Agri Environment Programme called 'ACRES' was introduced. Building on some of the principles of the Burren Programme (e.g. local support team, result-based payments, supporting actions), ACRES contained a Scheme dedicated to 'High Nature Value Farming' (HNVF) landscapes, including the Burren.

The target area for this 'Burren Aran ACRES Cooperation Project' includes the Burren, the Aran Islands and a section of south Galway. HNV Services, who previously managed the Burren Programme, is managing this project under a 5-year contract with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Over 14 staff (some part-time), based in the heart of the Burren, are now working with c.1,300 farmers in the extended region, with each farmer expected to receive annual payments of €7,500 for actions and outcomes. The team have carried out extensive education and training events with farmers and farm advisors and have generated a range of useful information resources to help farmers and their advisors.

The full details of this new Project are available at [www.acresburrenaran.ie](http://www.acresburrenaran.ie)

While the new Project is well-funded (thus meeting the 'Condition' attached to the EDPA Award) and has an excellent local team to manage it, it has been beset thus far with admin and IT challenges at Department level which have delayed payments to farmers. It is hoped that these issues will soon be resolved and Burren farmers will be supported to improve their farmed environments.

**2. Recommendations:** List here all recommendations which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the recommendations have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the recommendations. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

**1. prepare an overarching management framework document for the Burren Region diploma-holding area, outlining the various management initiatives and their inter-relationships;**

Under the ACRES Burren Aran Project, a Local Area Plan (LAP) has been developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. This plan outlines the key attributes of the area, the management challenges facing its natural and cultural heritage, and the measures which will be taken to address these challenges under ACRES. A copy of this plan is included with this report.

**2. aim both to increase the quality of the natural heritage and to prevent damage to the cultural heritage in those areas of the Burren Region not included within the three Special Areas of Conservation;**

Under the ACRES Burren Aran Project, a whole-farm approach is being taken across a wider geographical area than previously under the Burren Programme (which targeted only species-rich areas of the farms, mostly within SACs). The new Project will include protection, and enhancement of, the Burren's natural and cultural heritage over a much wider area as part of its key objectives. In addition, Burrenbeo Trust has a Conservation Volunteer Group who, usually twice monthly, work to improve the natural and cultural heritage of the Burren – from archaeological excavations to litter picking to seed collection.

**3. work with other stakeholders, especially those involved in tourism predicated on the farm holdings, as well as the natural and cultural heritage, to support communities living and working in the Burren Region;**

A Steering Committee has been established to help guide the new ACRES Burren Aran Project and to assess its progress relative to the objectives and targets set out in the Local Area Plan. Stakeholders dealing with tourism, planning and heritage are part of this Committee, as well local community representatives. The ACRES CP team also liaise closely with the Burrenbeo Trust, and with Local Authorities and the NPWS.

**4. consider the development of further walking trails throughout the Burren Region.**

While this is out width of the remit of the ACRES CP team and project, the ACRES CP Project Steering Committee will include the development of walking trails in its discussions. Burrenbeo Trust continues to host monthly walks in the Burren, many of them led by local farmers, thus opening out new areas of the Burren to visitors and students.

**3. Site Management:** List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

There have been no significant changes to site management since the last annual report (2023) when the new ACRES CP Burren Aran Project was launched. One small change has been the extension of NPWS property in the Burren to include 'McGann's farm' in the central Burren. Stocked with rare breeds of conservation-grazing cattle, the farm hosted the 2024 Burren Winterage Cattle drive with close to 1000 people in attendance. The event was covered on national TV news, highlighting the importance of farming in the Burren.

Regarding unresolved difficulties, certainly, the introduction of the new ACRES Project has not been without challenge. As part of a National Programme working with over 50,000 farmers and introducing new approaches (such as result-based payments) the paying agency (the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) have struggled to establish the required Admin and IT infrastructure in a short timeframe. This has resulted in delayed payments and delays in approving environmental works which has been frustrating for farmers, farm advisors and for local teams.

However, these issues are gradually being resolved and so we expect stronger progress in the years ahead.

**4. Boundaries:** Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

There have been no changes to the boundary of the European Diploma area since the adoption of the resolution.

**5. Other information:** List here any other information about the European Diploma holding site which you consider should be provided to the Council of Europe.

**Several noteworthy events were held in the Burren in 2024:**

Burren in Bloom (Burrenbeo Trust, May 2024)

Turas – Journeys in Stewardship (Creative Ireland and the Burrenbeo Trust, May-Oct 2024)

The Burren Winterage Festival (Burrenbeo Trust and the ACRES Burren Aran Programme), October 2024

NPWS-funded photo exhibition on Global Transhumance (incl. Burren) October 2024

Burrenbeo Trust carried out heritage courses in 8 local schools under its 'Calf and Cuckoo' Programme.

HNVS Staff hosted a number of national and international study groups – including the DG of the FAO – as well as addressing a number of National conferences on sustainable farming.

The Burren case study continues to regularly features on National TV, Radio, Newspapers and social media.

The ACRES Burren Aran Cooperation Project Team hosted, or contributed to, a large number of farmer training and advisor training events in 2024.

The following sections of the form should only be filled in if your area is in the year before a renewal of its European Diploma for Protected Areas, i.e. year 4 after the award of the European Diploma or year 9 after its renewal.

**6. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorphology, geology and hydrogeology, habitats, flora, fauna, landscape) – State of conservation**

- 6.1. Environment: changes or deterioration in the environment, of natural or anthropic origin, accidental or permanent, actual or anticipated
- 6.2. Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetational cover; presumed causes
- 6.3. Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating, egg-laying and breeding grounds

**7. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context**

- 7.1. Cultural heritage
  - 7.1.1. Changes concerning cultural heritage
- 7.2. Socio-economic context
  - 7.2.1. Changes concerning the socio-economic context

**8. Education and scientific interest**

- 8.1. Visitors – Information policy
  - 8.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)
  - 8.1.2. Frequentation by visitors and behavior (number, distribution in time and space)
  - 8.1.3. Special visits (distinguished persons, groups, etc.)
- 8.2. Scientific research
  - 8.2.1. Current or completed research (observation, experimentation, etc.; identification or inventory of the species listed in the appendices to the Bern Convention, etc.)
  - 8.2.2. Scientific publications

**9. Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)**

- 9.1. Changes in legislation or regulations
- 9.2. Changes in ownership title (conversion to public property, rentals, etc.)
- 9.3. Extension or transfer, new uses (for example, conversion into total reserve)

**10. Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)**

- 10.1. Improvements made
  - 10.1.1. Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes; controls of fauna
  - 10.1.2. Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)
  - 10.1.3. Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)
  - 10.1.4. Field equipment (hides and study facilities)
  - 10.1.5. Waste management
  - 10.1.6. Use of renewable energy systems
- 10.2. Management
  - 10.2.1. Administrative department: changes made
  - 10.2.2. Wardens' department: changes made
  - 10.2.3. Internal policing measures
  - 10.2.4. Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action

**11. Influence of the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas**

The EDPA award positively influenced the 2016 decision to continue, and expand, the Burren Programme, a decision which has been fundamental to the management of the Burren's natural and cultural heritage across 30,000ha of the Burren region, including most of the Natura 2000 designated land. This in turn has helped inform the ACRES Burren Aran Cooperation Programme which is the successor to the Burren Programme, operating over a much wider area (with the EDPA area at its core). It is hoped that this Programme will overcome initial challenges and deliver positive outcomes for the Burren.