

A DREAM OF BIRDS – IN THE LAKE COUNTY

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Wildlife photographer John McCauley is known to all in the Mullingar area – indeed all over Westmeath – as the most gentle of gentlemen.

But he is also a very quietly determined man, and John has a dream. A dream of birds.

For years John has been taking photographs of the birdlife of Lough Ennell. [He does it all over the Midlands but he particularly loves Ennell.] And this is where his dream is based. And it is a very reasonable one.

He would like to see just a small section of the north-eastern shore of Lough Ennell [nearest to the town of Mullingar] from Bloomfield to the mouth of the River Brosna – see map – declared as a sanctuary – not just for birds but for all wildlife – both shore and water. And within this area there should be access to just a few hides for discreet observation and recording. There would be a programme of judicious planting of plants, bushes and trees to provide food and shelter for wildlife for as much of the year as possible. The hides might be based on disused boat-houses in the area and make maximum use of local materials [including ‘scrap’ materials] and craft. They would be made lockable (to prevent abuse) and accessed only through agreed agents. And a programme would exist from the start for the collection and removal of all litter and waste in the designated area. Also, certain areas will be kept as inaccessible in the sanctuary to allow wildlife to prosper in peace.

Westmeath Environmental Group have now joined with John and ex-Councillor Frank McIntyre to try to make the dream a reality. They see a number of very real positives in John's scheme – such as:-

- (1) For minimal cost an area will be developed for recreation and pleasure with health benefits for all.
- (2) Immediate and on-going educational benefits.
- (3) Improving public awareness of, and appreciation of, wildlife and the riches of nature on our doorsteps.
- (4) As the area develops and matures so its value to us all will increase – it will become part of our living environment.
- (5) It will play a major role in Westmeath's efforts to protect and enhance our bio-diversity.
- (6) It will be an important and valuable resource for primary, secondary and third-level education in the county.
- (7) It could be a flagship project by which Westmeath could provide leadership to the whole country.
- (8) It has great potential to attract bird and wildlife watching holiday-makers which will have a positive financial benefit locally.

We know that Birdwatch Ireland look favourably on the idea and are willing to help with advice. We hope that the readers of Wings also approve and some may feel that they can even offer support, advice, ideas or even help. We can be contacted by email at weg1@eircom.net or by post via. Richard Murphy, PRO Westmeath Environmental Group, Hightown, Coralstown, Mullingar, Co Westmeath, and we would love to hear from you.

Who knows – you might play an important part in bringing to reality the dream of gentle John – a Dream of Birds!