

JANUARY 2026

BCV NEWSLETTER 2025

Annual newsletter of the Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers



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The Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers

The Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers form an active community that works towards the sustainable management of the Burren by addressing key conservation issues and needs in this special place. The group was set up in 2010 by the Burrenbeo Trust as an answer to the need of coordinated, hands-on, meaningful conservation work in the Burren region; enabling members of the (local) community to work for the benefit of this inspiring but fragile environment. Guided by a dedicated voluntary committee, the BCVs are a welcoming group of people, always on the look-out for new members, new conservation opportunities and new (community) groups to work in partnership with.



Some words from the Chair

KATE LAVENDER

It is hard to describe the feelings that struck me when I read the draft 2025 BCV newsletter: pride in such a dedicated team of volunteers who turn out no matter the weather, amazement at the huge range of events that were organised throughout the year (truly something for everyone), and deep respect for the experts and event leaders who generously give their time to train, guide and encourage others.

This is a true community effort, relying on so many generous people and showing how communities can come together to make a real difference for their places and our planet.

If you are an active volunteer, I hope you feel the same pride when looking back on all that has been achieved and the sense of belonging to a very special community. If you are a retired volunteer, I hope you look back with the same pride and fond memories. If you are yet to join us, I can say hand on heart that you won't regret coming along to an event. And if you have come across this report by chance, you're very welcome to look us up and join in.

Finally, a big shout-out to the BCV committee for steering the way with a steady hand and ensuring we continue to meet the needs of the Burren and its volunteers - well-deserved cake is on me at the next meeting!



BCV Committee

Set up in 2010, the BCV committee ensures that BCV events meet a definite conservation need in the Burren and give volunteers the best experience possible. The committee members meet three times per year and rotate as event coordinators to make sure that Health and Safety standards are met during events.



Kate Karen Eileen

Kate Lavender

(Chair)

Karen van Dorp

(Coordinator)

Eileen O'Connor

(Secretary)

Louise Brogan

(Committee Member)

Risteard Crimmins

(Committee Member)

Margaret Duffy

(Committee Member)

Mike Scanlon

(Committee Member)



Louise Margaret Mike Risteard

The BCVs are involved in a range of conservation and maintenance projects in the Burren region; including scrub clearing for archaeological and conservation purposes, excavations, traditional dry stone wall repairs, biodiversity surveys and native tree and shrub seed collecting. All our work is carried out with permission of the relevant authorities.

2025 in numbers



31 events



297 attendances



1188 volunteer hours



21 event awards



1 donation



3 grants



Archaeological scrub clearing: Moyree portal tomb

RISTEARD CRIMMINS | JANUARY 2025

The Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers kicked off the new year with a fantastic hands-on conservation project in the Burren, turning their attention to an impressive portal tomb at Moyree Commons (National Monuments map reference CL018-011). On the day, a group of fourteen volunteers carried out vital scrub clearance at the site, which had been completely hidden from view beneath dense growth of briars. The work was supervised by Elaine Lynch (Field Monument Advisor Co. Clare) and Linda Lynch from the National Monuments Service.



Removing scrub from archaeological sites is essential conservation work, as unchecked vegetation can cause erosion and even structural instability over time. With the vegetation removed, it is now possible to gain a clearer impression of how this dolmen would have appeared when its chamber and capstone were intact and in situ, despite the damage it has suffered over the centuries.

The remaining upright stone is particularly striking. According to de Valera and Ó'Nualláin's Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland, it stands 2.7 metres high - approximately one metre taller than the well-known Poul nabrone Dolmen. Moyree Commons is one of very few portal tombs in the Burren region and among an estimated 150 such monuments nationwide, underlining the importance of continued care and conservation of these remarkable reminders of our prehistoric past.







Fanore Beach clean-ups

EILEEN O'CONNOR | MARCH & SEPTEMBER 2025

As a group, the BCVs have adopted the entire Burren coastline as their focus for the Clean Coasts Big Beach Clean initiative. In 2025, two major beach clean-ups were organised: a 'Clean Up Mother Earth' Mother's Day Beach Clean-Up in March (in collaboration with members of the Burren Ecotourism Network) and a Big BCV Beach Clean in September. The team also featured in the Clean Coasts newsletter as long-standing contributors to this national initiative.



Planting the tenth Burren Pine site

KAREN VAN DORP | MARCH 2025

We had a fantastic day in March with a super team of volunteers as we planted 124 Burren pines along with 352 companion species at Moyree Commons, completing the tenth and final site of the Burren Pine Project. Reaching this milestone is a huge achievement, and we are incredibly grateful to everyone who contributed their time and energy to make the project such a success.

The Burren Pine Project is a community-led conservation initiative of the Burrenbeo Trust, focused on restoring native pine woodland in the Burren. *Pinus sylvestris* was once a dominant feature of the landscape but disappeared from the Irish landscape around 1,500 years ago. While later reintroductions came from Scotland, it was discovered that a small native population survived in a remote part of the Burren. Seeds from this unique population were collected under licence from the NPWS, grown on in a local nursery, and planted out in a series of 'mini-forests' across the region. Together, these sites represent a significant step towards regenerating this rare native tree and strengthening the ecological resilience of the Burren.



Post-excavation training

KAREN VAN DORP | MAY & JUNE 2025

Two intensive three-day post-excavation training sessions were completed, offering participants structured, hands-on experience with archaeological material spanning several millennia.

The training began with soil sample processing from Ballganner North, guided by Mary Dillon. Through flotation and detailed sorting, participants examined environmental and micro-archaeological evidence and gained a clearer understanding of its role in site interpretation.

Subsequent sessions focused on artefact washing and preliminary assessment of material from a Mesolithic/Neolithic axe-production site in Doolin. Working directly with lithic fragments provided insight into prehistoric manufacturing techniques and the technological skill of early communities in the Burren.

The final component centred on artefacts from a herdsman's cottage in Fahee North, illustrating more recent patterns of rural life and demonstrating how post-excavation work contributes to reconstructing domestic and agricultural histories.

Across the three days, significant progress was achieved, supported by the dedication and careful work of all participants. Sincere thanks are extended to Michael, Clodagh and Elaine Lynch and Mary Dillon for such a unique training opportunity for the BCVs!





Yellow Rattle seed collecting

KAREN VAN DORP | JUNE 2025

There are few better ways to spend a warm summer evening than collecting yellow rattle seed in a beautiful Burren meadow, with the knowledge that this work will help create and restore wildflower meadows in the years ahead. Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers once again played a key role in this important seasonal activity, combining practical conservation with careful stewardship of local habitats.

Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) is a vital species in the creation and maintenance of species-rich grasslands. As a semi-parasitic plant, it reduces the dominance of vigorous grasses, allowing a greater diversity of wildflowers to establish. By collecting locally sourced seed, volunteers are supporting biodiversity while also preserving the unique local genetic character of Burren grasslands.

Once collected, the seed was carefully dried and stored before being made available for sale through the Burrenbeo Trust website. Proceeds from seed sales help fund the actions of the Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers and contribute to future meadow creation and enhancement projects.

This hands-on conservation work is a powerful example of how relatively small actions can deliver lasting environmental benefits, and it highlights the essential role our incredible volunteers play in protecting and restoring the Burren's remarkable natural heritage.



Dry stone wall repairing

LOUISE BROGAN | JULY 2025

The Burren is renowned for its limestone pavements and rich cultural heritage, and few features are as iconic or as deeply embedded in the landscape as its dry stone walls. Stretching across fields and hillsides, these walls are a constant reminder of the Burren's unique identity and of a built landscape shaped by centuries of human skill, labour, and local knowledge.

In July, a dedicated group of Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers came together on a Burren farm to rebuild sections of dry stone wall using traditional methods. With no cement or machinery - just hands, stone, and teamwork - the volunteers helped restore walls that are both highly labour-intensive to build and demanding to maintain. As rural populations age and fewer young people remain in farming communities, this work is becoming increasingly difficult for farmers to manage alone.



Dry stone walls are constructed from carefully selected, interlocking stones, placed without mortar. Their strength comes from the weight, balance, and skill with which each stone is set, making every wall unique to its location, materials, and maker.

These walls provide essential field boundaries and shelter for livestock, while also supporting biodiversity by offering habitats and corridors for a wide range of plants and animals. They are also an inherently sustainable form of construction, using local materials and requiring minimal intervention once properly built.

By helping to rebuild these walls, Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers are not only supporting local farmers but also learning a highly skilled craft that has been practiced in the Burren for over a thousand years. This hands-on conservation work protects ecosystems, preserves cultural heritage, and ensures that an irreplaceable element of the Burren landscape is passed on to future generations.



Bat roost site conservation maintenance

MIKE SCANLON | FEBRUARY & OCTOBER 2025

Dromore Stables in the southeast of the Burren is home to an important roost of the Lesser horseshoe bat, one of Ireland's smallest and most distinctive bat species. Recognisable by its horseshoe-shaped noseleaf, this bat is also one of our most vulnerable mammals and is protected under Irish and EU legislation. Lesser horseshoe bats rely on a network of safe roosts and high-quality surrounding habitat, including insect-rich woodland, hedgerows, and scrub, to survive.

Lesser Horseshoe Bats depend on a rich mosaic of woodland, scrub, hedgerows, and wetlands to forage successfully, feeding on a variety of insect species. Because they are highly sensitive to habitat change, their presence is a strong indicator of a healthy ecosystem. However, they are particularly sensitive to habitat loss, disturbance, and changes in their foraging landscape, which makes careful site management essential, not only for the bats themselves but for wider biodiversity.

In collaboration with local NPWS Rangers and The Heritage Council, Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers have been working at Dromore Stables to help protect and enhance the habitat around the roost. Ongoing volunteer efforts take place during the winter months (outside the period of summer roosting) and focus on managing invasive species, maintaining suitable vegetation structure, and improving biodiversity across the grounds. This work helps ensure that the bats have access to good-quality foraging areas and safe flight corridors between roosts and feeding sites. This September, BCVs were treated to a special bat emergence walk on the site, led by bat specialist Sinead Biggane, to meet the bats they are protecting!

Through practical, hands-on conservation, Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers are helping to safeguard this important bat population while supporting wider biodiversity at Dromore Stables; demonstrating how targeted habitat management can make a real difference for threatened species in the Burren.



Graveyard recording St Fachnan's Kilfenora

LOUISE BROGAN | MAY, JUNE, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER 2025

Initiated in early 2024 and led by archaeologists Edel Barry and Elaine Lynch, the graveyard recording project at St Fachnan's Cathedral graveyard in Kilfenora has now entered the review phase, though considerable work remains. The continued enthusiasm, commitment and care shown by the Burrenbeo Trust Conservation Volunteers during four recording days in 2025 have been central to its success, demonstrating the impact of community-led heritage initiatives carried out with purpose and collaboration.





Burren turf tiles project

KATE LAVENDER | AUGUST 2025

Turf tiles - drystone structures used historically to dry peat - are a notable yet understudied feature of the Burren landscape. Although the National Monuments Service dates them to the 18th-20th centuries, only eight have been officially recorded in the Burren, despite strong local indications that many more exist.

A small Royal Irish Academy grant enabled the first focused study of these monuments under supervision of Kate Lavender. The project had two components: 1) Ground survey to locate and document unrecorded turf tiles, and 2) Online research to identify historical references to turf tiles.



With guidance from ecologist Sharon Parr, two contrasting survey areas near Ballyvaughan were chosen: upland limestone terrain on James Keane's land and bog-edge ground on Maggie Howard's land. Aerial mapping suggested 52 possible turf tiles, but nine Burren Conservation Volunteers ultimately surveyed an impressive 143 turf tiles and 58 additional archaeological features, contributing nearly 170 volunteer hours.

A separate team of volunteers conducted online and textual research, whose results will be incorporated into the final report. Data analysis is now underway, and the full project report will be submitted to the RIA and shared more widely.

The project acknowledges the essential contributions of landowners, volunteers, experts, and supporting institutions.

Burrenbeo Volunteers Social 2025

KAREN VAN DORP | AUGUST 2025

At Burrenbeo Trust, we deeply value the work of our volunteers. We appreciate so many people giving their time, skills and effort to make the Burren a better place! To show our gratitude, all our volunteers are invited to our annual 'Volunteer Social' to take a break from all the hard work, acknowledging all accomplishments while enjoying the beautiful Burren landscape and each other's company.



This year our Social was kindly hosted by the Burren College of Art in Ballyvaughan. We enjoyed an incredible lunch catered by Siar Cafe (Kinvara) in the College courtyard after a short, steep hike on Cappanawalla to collectively marvel at the views over North Clare!

Archaeological scrub clearing: Lissylisheen wedge tomb

MARGARET DUFFY | SEPTEMBER 2025

The autumn season of archaeological scrub clearance in the Burren got off to a fantastic start with Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers heading deep into the landscape to work at Lissylisheen Wedge Tomb. On the first Sunday in October, a team of around fifteen volunteers joined archaeologist Elaine Lynch to tackle the overgrowth that had completely hidden this Bronze Age monument.

Although Lissylisheen has been recorded for centuries and appears on Ordnance Survey maps, its location was not immediately obvious after a short walk in from the road. The tomb was entirely obscured by dense scrub, including bramble, blackthorn, and hazel. Equipped with hand tools, the volunteers set to work, carefully clearing the vegetation over the course of a few hours.



By the end of the morning, the remains of the tomb emerged from the greenery. While the side stones had collapsed and the capstone was dislodged, key elements of the original chamber were clearly visible, along with some kerb stones, and the monument's mound could be appreciated in its original context. The tomb's position on the edge of a large enclosure added further archaeological interest.

After an informative talk from Elaine Lynch, volunteers enjoyed a coffee break before making their way back to car shares and home. This hands-on work not only revealed an important part of the Burren's heritage but also helped protect it from further damage, highlighting the vital role that careful vegetation management plays in conserving the region's archaeological landscape.

Burren Ark Project: native tree and shrub seed collecting

MARGARET DUFFY | AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER 2025

Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers have been actively supporting the Burren Ark Project through a series of native tree and shrub collection events held in August, September, and October at different locations across the Burren. During these days, volunteers collected a range of native tree and shrub species of local provenance, including Burnet Rose, Rowan, Spindle, Holly, Guelder Rose, Crab Apple and Buckthorn, as part of Burrenbeo's wider effort to strengthen the future supply of native planting material.

The Burren Ark Project focuses on enhancing the availability of locally sourced native trees and shrubs, helping to protect the unique genetic heritage of the Burren. All collection work was carried out under NPWS permission and in line with ENSCONET best practice, ensuring that material was gathered responsibly and sustainably from healthy populations in the wild.

Guided by forester Bernard Carey, volunteers learned how to identify suitable specimens and collect cuttings and seeds correctly. The collected material will be grown on into saplings and, in time, planted through the Hare's Corner Project, where it will contribute to habitat creation, improved ecological connectivity, and greater resilience in the landscape.





Archaeological scrub clearing: Ballybornagh house and road

RISTEARD CRIMMINS | OCTOBER 2025

Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers visited Ballybornagh in October, by kind permission of landowner Vinnie Keane, who previously hosted a very informative Burrenbeo Trust farm walk at this location. Tucked into the base of a mountain are the remains of an 18th-19th century settlement (house and enclosures).

The house structure was at risk of further damage due to the growth of whitethorn and ash trees both within and around the walls. Under the supervision of archaeologist Elaine Lynch, volunteers carefully removed vegetation to help stabilise the remains and prevent further deterioration.

The building retains a slightly battered western gable wall and features two internal alcoves in the opposite gable. The doorway appears to have been located in the north-facing wall. This dwelling is shown on pre-famine maps, indicating that it is of some antiquity. At a later date, it appears to have been linked to a nearby settlement to the north by a substantial walled roadway. This roadway is visible on late nineteenth-century maps but does not appear on earlier editions.

A short distance to the west lies a beautiful well, with the ruins of a small structure built over its outflow. This too appears to be of some age and was likely the water source for both the house and the nearby settlement.

Volunteers also cleared trees and branches that were obstructing the passageway where it enters the settlement from the north. This settlement exhibits many of the features of a clachan - a traditional form of rural settlement common in Ireland, particularly in marginal landscapes. A clachan typically consisted of a small cluster of houses, often occupied by related families, with shared access to land, water, and routes. Unlike later planned villages, clachans grew organically over time and reflect a communal way of life that largely disappeared in the nineteenth century. The Ballybornagh clachan appears to have comprised four or five dwellings, along with several smaller structures. The roadway leading to it from the north remains clearly defined for several hundred metres. Standing here, one can easily imagine the lives of this small community, surviving on the edge of bare limestone while possibly farming the better land to the south.



This little settlement reminds us of a time when dispossession and displacement were the lot of many in Ireland. Today, the ruins lie quietly within a wooded glade. When the Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers visited, the sun was shining and a buzzard and raven were observed competing for territory high overhead. On this occasion, it was the buzzard who was displaced! It is worth noting that when this settlement was occupied, fuel would have been scarce and the landscape far more open (it is unlikely there was as much as a stick standing here). Even now, the oldest trees in the area are no more than thirty or forty years old.

Historic maps reveal further insights. Immediately west of the clachan, on the lower slopes of the hill, are three large walled enclosures. These fields are surrounded by substantial stone walls, built with two outer faces of large stones and carefully infilled with smaller, rounded stones painstakingly cleared from the ground. As these enclosures do not appear on early nineteenth-century maps, they suggest that the inhabitants were actively trying to make this marginal landscape productive during the latter half of that century.

As always, expeditions like this raise important questions and deepen our understanding of how past communities lived, worked, and adapted to challenging environments.





Archaeological scrub clearing Cahermackirilla ringfort

MIKE SCANLON | NOVEMBER 2025

In November, Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers carried out vegetation clearance at an impressive ringfort in the heart of the Burren. Cahermackirilla cashel, along with a house and souterrain, was so overgrown that it couldn't even be located on arrival! Only small stretches of the cashel wall remained visible. Under blue skies and with a big, enthusiastic BCV crew, we made great progress - uncovering sections of the cashel and house, and creating an opening for cattle to help keep the vegetation down.

This cashel is one of seven in the townland of Cahermackirilla and also contains a recorded house and souterrain, which was relocated and cleared on the day. We will return to this site next year, as there is still a lot to do!







Butterfly breeding habitat maintenance and survey

KATE LAVENDER | FEBRUARY, SEPTEMBER, DECEMBER 2025

Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers had a busy and rewarding year caring for the Fahee North site in Carron, with two maintenance days in February and December, and a survey event in September. These activities are essential for protecting the local breeding grounds of several threatened butterfly species, most notably the Marsh Fritillary. This species depends on open, species-rich grasslands where its food plant, Devil's-bit Scabious, thrives. Without careful management, scrub and heavy vegetation can quickly take over, making the habitat unsuitable for caterpillars.

On each maintenance day, BCVs worked with hand tools to clear hazel scrub, helping maintain the delicate balance these butterflies need to survive.

The September survey gave the team the chance to monitor butterfly populations and evaluate the condition of the habitat, providing crucial information to guide future conservation efforts. This year, an impressive 38 nests were recorded - the highest number ever observed at the site! A fantastic reward and a real testament to the dedication and hard work of everyone involved.

A massive thanks to all who took part, braving wind, rain, and cold to make a real difference. Special thanks to Jesmond Harding of Butterfly Conservation Ireland and Eamonn Twomey for their support and expertise, and to the Robson family for granting access to their land. The work at Fahee North, supported by the PNCES grant (NPWS), highlights how teamwork, local knowledge, and careful management can protect some of the Burren's most vulnerable species.





Passionate about the Burren's natural and cultural heritage? Becoming a Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteer means you get to enjoy the Burren landscape while working for its conservation together with like-minded people.

Contact us via **volunteer@burrenbeo.com** for more info and signing up.
We'd love to hear from you!

The Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers is a community-led initiative coordinated by the Burrenbeo Trust, a non-profit organisation dedicated to connecting all of us to our places and our role in taking care of them.
Support our work by becoming a member at **burrenbeo.com**

