

FOREST BIODIVERSITY

OVERVIEW

PLANFORBIO

Programme leader: Prof. John O'Halloran

Programme manager: Dr Sandra Irwin

The knowledge base on forest biodiversity in Ireland remains relatively restricted to certain forest types and taxonomic groups, although progress has been made in recent years through state funding of the National Survey of Native Woods and the BIOFOREST project. PLANFORBIO will build upon these efforts, expanding the number of forest types in which biodiversity is understood and drafting management and monitoring guidelines for these habitats. There will be a focus on particular elements of diversity and aspects of management that are important to Irish forest policy through large-scale studies of forest biodiversity. In addition, special studies will be made of two species that are of great interest to Irish and European conservation and diversity: the Hen Harrier, one of Ireland's raptors associated with forested habitats, and the invasive alien plant *Rhododendron ponticum*.

A primary aim of the programme is to address forest diversity and management, focusing on forest types that are currently being encouraged through state policies and financial incentives. These are the Irish forests of the future, and little is currently known about their capacity for biodiversity conservation. The aim of the Hen Harrier and *Rhododendron* studies is to develop decision-making tools about forest planning and management draft action plans for species conservation or control. These will be achieved through four discrete research projects with over-arching objectives and outputs:

FORESTBIO: Managing for biodiversity in a range of Irish forest types.

RHODO: Achieving effective *Rhododendron* control.

HENHARRIER: Optimum scenarios for Hen Harrier conservation in Ireland.

BIOPLAN: Implementation of an assessment and monitoring programme for forest biodiversity.

The PLANFORBIO programme will support decision-making through the provision of information on forest biodiversity in the form of user-friendly databases, peer reviewed scientific papers and stakeholder focussed workshops. In addition, the four projects will contribute policy relevant recommendations for sustainable forest management and conservation. This programme will have an emphasis on outreach and information dissemination through workshops and seminars with target audiences such as forestry contractors and managers. PLANFORBIO also supports national strategic objectives of increasing the

number of post-graduate students being trained in Ireland and will ultimately build research capacity that underpins an important sustainable national industry.

Further information can be found on the programme website at www.ucc.ie/en/planforbio

A separate but related project to the PLANFORBIO programme is **FUNCTIONALBIO**. This project examines the functional aspects of forest ecosystems, particularly the fungi and soil fauna which play an important role in decomposition and nutrient cycling within forests. Among the aims of the project are to assess the below-ground faunal biodiversity of forests, compile a macrofungal inventory of selected woodland sites, determine the mycorrhizal diversity on forest trees and develop methodologies to assess and enhance biodiversity in forests.