

NATIVE WOODLAND TRUST



Native Woodland Trust

Keeping Ireland Green



Ireland

like many places is facing environmental challenges. The Ireland Funds is supporting the Native Woodland Trust in its efforts to save and restore Ireland's forests and native species of trees. Here, Jim Lawlor, Chairman of the Native Woodland Trust, shares the importance of their work and the positive steps The Ireland Funds has enabled them to make in keeping Ireland green.



Jim Lawlor

Chairman of the Native Woodland Trust



What's the first thing you think of when you think of Ireland? The Emerald Isle? Forty Shades of Green?

There can be little doubt that on the surface, Ireland appears to be a green and pleasant land, but in the modern vernacular—is Ireland's environment as healthy and green as it should be?

The reality might surprise you. Ireland avoided the levels of pollution associated with the industrial revolution and we still have little or no heavy industry. There are green fields everywhere, surrounded by hedgerows and picturesque untidy roadsides, full of weeds and wildflowers.

But originally, Ireland was a heavily forested island, with trees growing to the tops of all but the tallest mountains. We now have only 0.1% of our forests left—99.9% of them are gone. And with the loss of the forests went many wild animals and untold other species, along with a huge part of Gaelic culture.

Gone are our Wolves, Brown Bears, Lynx, Wildcats, Wild Boar. All of our Eagle species were extinct and have had to be reintroduced in recent years. We have also lost several species of Arctic Char (a type of fish related to salmon), all of which were unique to Ireland, due to pollution of their lakes. None of our species of Freshwater Pearl mussel (a freshwater shellfish) have bred in decades as there is not one river in Ireland clean enough to support them.

The original Irish form of writing, known as Ogham, associated each letter of the alphabet with one of the tree species of Ireland. In fact, the 8th Century Laws of the Neighborhood laid down what are probably the first written environmental laws in Europe. There were fines for cutting and damaging trees and the different species were even given importance in the same way that the Gaelic Order was structured—some trees such as Oak were considered "nobles" while others were the "commoners" of the woods. That forests were once such a large part of our culture has all but been forgotten.

Most of the depredations of our forests were carried out in past centuries, but even today, the few remaining fragments of forest are still under threat. Some are not protected by law and for those that are the penalties are so light that it is often possible to cut down a forest, pay the fine, sell the land and still make a profit.

In response to this, The Native Woodland Trust was founded by a number of concerned citizens. The Trust was setup to protect the existing forests as its primary aim. Once cut down, the nearest source of seed is unlikely to be native Irish trees and the ancient forests can never be recreated.

Our secondary aim is to replant forests where we can—using only native seed from Ireland and preferably from within a few miles.

Thanks to The Ireland Funds, we have been able to achieve successes which are rare or unmatched in environmental circles in Ireland.

Amongst our recent work, we have taken charge of an Ancient Woodland (one of the original 0.1%) in county Westmeath. We are currently bidding to purchase the surrounding land so that we can triple the size of this wood.

We have also managed to acquire a very rare river floodplain woodland in the Slieve Bloom Mountains. In the very area where the Celtic warrior Finn McCool learned to fight & hunt and in the shadow of Wolftrap mountain, we have preserved this ancient woodland and the spawning beds of the Croneen Trout. (The Croneen is confirmed by DNA sampling as unique just to the river Camcor in Ireland).

Further woodland reserves have been acquired in Co Wicklow, near Glendalough—Waterford City, County Meath, County Longford and County Donegal.

We dearly hope that these are just the beginning of the restoration of the grandeur of Ireland's forests and that, through the generosity and vision of The Ireland Funds donors', we can continue our crucial work.

About the Author

Jim Lawlor is the Chairman and one of the original founders of the Native Woodland Trust. Jim, like all members the Trust's Board of Directors, is a volunteer and donates his time to the organization.

With The Ireland Funds support of €25,000

the Native Woodland Trust attracted matching funding as well as a media partner and distributed over **20,000 trees** to schools all over Ireland.

With The Ireland Funds support of €100,000

land in the Wicklow Mountains was purchased and is now being transformed into an upland forest.

With The Ireland Funds support of €100,000

an additional **€65,000** was raised locally to enable the purchase of the rare ancient floodplain forest of Camcor in the Slieve Bloom mountains.

With The Ireland Funds support of €500,000

the Native Woodland Trust has been funded for **3 years**—including employing **2** full time staff, setting up an office and running **150** free-to-attend events for local communities all around Ireland.

Volunteers

replanting forests with the Native Woodland Trust

