

# environment

THIS MODULE SHOWS HOW THE VIEW OF PEATLANDS HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS. ORIGINALLY PEATLANDS WERE REGARDED AS USELESS WASTELANDS, TO BE RECLAIMED AS VALUABLE AGRICULTURAL LAND. THEY WERE LATER REGARDED AS A FUEL RESOURCE AND ARE NOW REGARDED AS DISTINCTIVE AND VALUABLE HABITATS. THE DISPLAYS SHOW THE CHANGING VIEWS ON THE VALUES OF PEATLANDS.

# an comhshaol

LÉIRÍONN AN MHODÚIL CONAS A D'ATHRAIGH AN MHEON I DTAOBH NA BPORTACH THAR NA BLIANTA. GO BUNÚSACH, SONRAÍODH TAILTE PORTAIGH MAR THAILTE GAN RATH GAN ÚSÁID ACH MÍNTÍRÍODH AN TALAMH MAR THALAMH TALMHAÍOCHTA LUACHMHAR. SONRAÍODH NA TAILTE INA DHIAIDH SIN MAR ACMHAINN BHREOSLA AGUS SONRAÍTEAR ANOIS IAD MAR SHAINGHNÁTHÓGA LUACHMHARA. LÉIRÍONN NA TAISPEÁNTAIS AN MHEON AG ATHRÚ MAIDIR LE LUACH NA BPORTACH.

Peatlands are distinctive and valuable habitats. They were not always recognised as such. For centuries bogs were regarded as barren land; a blight on the countryside. Locals, entrepreneurs and even governments attempted to find ways to use or reclaim them. Up until about 50 years ago, people hoped to create fertile pasture on both virgin and exhausted bogland. Todd Andrews' vision was to turn the Bog of Allen into the Forest of Allen

after harvesting its peat. Many others after him have tried to find viable uses for cutaway bog. There can be no uniform approach: solutions must be developed which work with the conditions in each individual bog. In the 1930s context of high unemployment and low economic activity, the focus was on stimulating the country's economy. However, it has always been expected that exhausted peatland would provide some beneficial use.



1.

1. Virgin bog.
2. Wetland, Lough Boora Parklands.



2.



## **'DESERTS' AND WETLANDS**

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People have taken notice of Irish bogs since the 16th century, when Edmund Spenser referred to them as 'deserts', a strange paradox for a habitat which is 95% water. In the 19th century the British government turned its eye to Ireland's bogs. Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington and Prime Minister, wanted to reclaim Irish bogs to grow flax, which could be used to produce hemp for sail cloth for the fight against Napoleon.

Wellington's proposals led to the establishment of the Bog Commission, whose surveyors produced the earliest detailed maps of Ireland and a plan for draining the bogs. Although the recommendations of the Commission were never implemented, the economic conditions and fuel crises of the 20th century meant that many of the bogs were ultimately used for fuel and energy (for the most part), and attempts to find suitable after-use continued.



**IT IS NOW RECOGNISED THAT PEATLANDS ARE IN THEMSELVES A RARE AND UNIQUE HABITAT AND ARE CRUCIAL TO IRELAND'S WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY. BORD NA MÓNA HAS COMMITTED TO PROTECTING AND REHABILITATING BOGS AND WORKS WITH THE NPWS\* AND THE IPCC\* IN DOING THIS. LOUGH BOORA PARKLANDS IN CO. OFFALY DEMONSTRATES THE POTENTIAL OF REHABILITATED BOGS TO ENHANCE BIODIVERSITY IN A PEATLAND LANDSCAPE.**

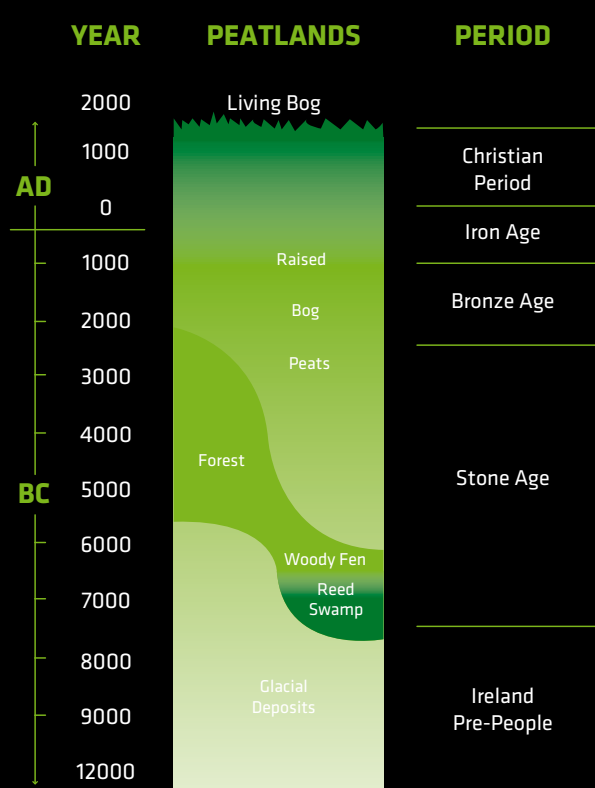
*\*NPWS (National Parks and Wildlife Service)  
\*IPCC (Irish Peatlands Conservation Council)*

Grey Heron.



During the 1950s, Bord na Móna experimented with growing forestry on cutaway bog in Clonsast, Co. Offaly. Tom Barry oversaw trials at Trench 14 in Clonsast that provided valuable insights into the potential for growing trees as after-use of cutaway bog. At that time Todd Andrews regarded the existence of bogland as an “affront to our national pride”, and intended to eventually convert the Bog of Allen into the Forest of Allen.

In more recent times cutaway bogs have been returned to wetland habitats. Tom Egan is one of the Bord na Móna employees who has been involved in the Lough Boora Parklands since its inception in 1994. Tom is particularly involved in the flora and fauna of the parklands, which are continually evolving. The Boora Parklands is home to a long-term survey by BirdWatch Ireland to monitor the use of the area by species such as Whooper Swan, Lapwing and a range of other wetland birds. Bord na Móna also plans to establish a new visitor centre at Lough Boora to provide educational tours.



1. Merlin.
2. Golden Plover and Lapwings.



Bird hide at Lough Boora Parklands.





