

# Belcarra Riverside Walk

## Background

The Miranda River, also known as the Manulla River, is a tributary of the Rivery Moy. It runs through the heart of Belcarra village.

In 1997, an overall area plan for Belcarra drawn up and a 3km Riverside Loop Walk, with a pedestrian bridge across the river and linking Elmhall to Belcarra village, was proposed and costed by Belcarra Community Council. Work commenced on the Riverside walk in 1999 with approval from landowners and the Fishery Board.

## Funding

Community fundraising was ongoing with the South West Mayo Leader Co. agreeing to part fund the project. The funding sourced was as follows:

Raffle in October 1999	€1,000
Auction in November 1999	€3,000
Race Night in May 2000	€2,000
Leader Grant funding	€3,850
Donations	€ 500
<b>Total</b>	<b>€10,350</b>

## About the walk

The purpose of this walk was to create a peaceful, safe, environmentally friendly loop walk. It combines history with archaeology and biodiversity. The section of path alongside the river is mown grass and we recommend all-weather footwear should be worn. You will find laminated information sheets available at locations along the walk.

There are several signboards along the walk which help create awareness of flora and fauna, history and tradition for locals and visitors.



## Historical sites along the walk

- Elmhall Cemetery which has been renovated by Belcarra Community Council with the support of Mayo County Council and the relatives of some of those buried there. The graves include those of the Walsh family, victims of the last Belcarra eviction (in October 1886).
- The Eviction Cottage from which the Walsh family was evicted (you can find more information about this in the History section of the website).
- Ruins of Elm Hall house or Cuffe's castle (also known as Lord Tirawley's castle).

## Nature along the walk

The riverside walk provides the opportunity to observe many natural features of the landscape and wildlife. If you look carefully and take the time to stop and watch, there are lots of interesting plants and animals to see. The following notes are just a brief introduction to the nature of the Miranda/Manulla River and its environment.

### Plants

Trees: Willow, Alder, Spindle, Holly, Alder Buckthorn, Ash, Poplar, Sycamore.

Some Flowers: Pyramidal Orchid, Codlins and cream, Bluebell, Twayblade, Carline Thistle, Bugle,

The aquatic vegetation of the river is extremely rich, with many different species of plants growing in and next to the water. Some of the more obvious plants are:

Bur-reed growing in the water with spiky seed heads

Bulrush round, very dark green stems

Water dropwort with a head of tiny white flowers

### Mammals

You will be very lucky to see any mammals, but there are foxes and badgers using the riverside path (so look for footprints in the mud), or you may be lucky and see an Irish Hare. Otters also use the area along with the non-native American mink. Several Bat species occur and the Daubenton's bat hunt insects over the river in the summer evenings.

### Birds

There are many species to be seen along the river, but they fly, so they are not always there!

Watch out especially for:

Swallow hunting over the water for insects on the wing

Pied wagtail searching for insects in the bankside vegetation

Grey heron standing in the water looking for fish and frogs

Kingfisher flying along the river with a high pitched call

Mallard a large duck, usually flying rapidly out of the riverside vegetation when disturbed

Mute swan sometimes seen here with their cygnets

### Insects

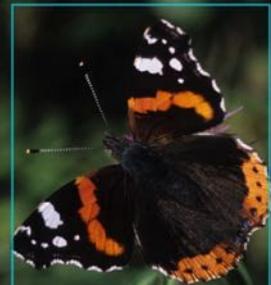
Meadow brown butterflies are common, and you may see other butterflies such as the peacock (dark brown with "eyes" on the wings), the Small Tortoiseshell butterfly (patterned like its name), or even the rare Small Copper butterfly (which is that colour!). The river is an excellent habitat for dragonflies and damselflies and there are several species to be seen at different times of year.

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## Red Admiral Aimiréal Dearg

This butterfly is a migratory species. Resident populations of the butterfly in southern Europe breed early in the year. Then as the weather warms, the adults and their offspring start to move north, breeding as they travel. The food plant of the caterpillars is nettles. Once out of the egg, the young caterpillar pulls the nettle leaf around itself and binds it with silken thread making a "tent" where it can feed and grow. The adult can be seen flying from May to September.

## and Biodiversity Trail



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## Daubenton's Bat

## and Biodiversity Trail

Bats eat thousands of flying insects every night, including midges. The Common and Soprano Pipistrelle bats are those commonly seen flying around soon after dusk in our village. A single Pipistrelle weighs no more than 6g which is the weight of a €1 piece. Daubenton's bat is often called the "water bat" because it flies just a few centimetres above lakes and rivers. You can often see it flying over the Manulla River if you watch from the bridge near the Community Centre. They roost under the stone bridge.



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# Belcarra Riverside Walk

## Common Blue Damselfly

## and Biodiversity Trail

Damselflies differ from dragonflies in that they are much smaller. They are very agile but do not have prolonged flight, speed and aerial abilities that dragonflies do. They fly from May to September each year. During mating, the male clasps the female by her neck while she bends her body around to his reproductive organs - this is called a mating wheel. The pair flies together over the water and eggs are laid within a suitable plant, just below the surface. The eggs hatch and the larvae, called nymphs, live in the water and feed on small aquatic animals. Nymphs climb out of the water up a suitable stem to moult into damselflies.



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# Belcarra Riverside Walk

## Emperor Moth

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This moth is a spectacular insect. On the wing in April and May, they are a large, day-flying moth which is often mistaken for a butterfly. It likes scrub habitat on fens, hedgerows and woodland paths. The spots on the wings mimic pairs of eyes and help protect it from being eaten by predators. The food plant for the caterpillar is meadowsweet, heather, hawthorn, bramble and birch. The pupa spends the winter in a silk casing at the base of the food plant emerging the following spring.



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## Green-veined white Bánóg Uaine

## and Biodiversity Trail

This butterfly prefers damp areas with lush vegetation. The eggs are laid on the foodplants of the caterpillar which are quite varied ranging from wild cabbage, wild radish to ladies smock and nasturtium. They are on the wing from April to mid-September. The so-called green veins on the underside of the adults are, in fact, an illusion created by a subtle combination of yellow and black scales.



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## Lords-and-ladies (or Cuckoo-pint) Cluas chaoin

## and Biodiversity Trail

This native plant is of the lily family. It flowers from March to May and has red berries in August. All parts of the plant are poisonous to people and should not be eaten. The root-tuber may be very big and is a source of starch and in the 1400s was used as laundry starch for altar cloths and other church linens.



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## Brown-lipped Snail

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This snail is named after the brown band of colouring found around the opening of the shell. All snails and slugs are gastropods which means "stomach foot" because when they move around it looks like they are crawling on their stomachs. Snails are neither male nor female, as each snail has the organs of both sexes, they are hermaphrodites. The Brown-lipped snail likes to eat dead or decaying plants so is not usually a nuisance for gardeners. A main predator of snails is the bird the Song thrush who has learned to crack open the snail shell by striking it against a stone.



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# Belcarra Riverside Walk

## Cuckoo spit

## and Biodiversity Trail

This white frothy liquid is commonly known as "cuckoo spit" but is in fact caused not by cuckoos but by the nymph of the small insect the common froghopper. A small pale yellow-green insect lives inside the froth between May and July which is the nymph of the froghopper. It can be found on many plants in gardens and in the wild and it does no harm to the plants.



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## Irish Hare

*Giorria*

The Irish Hare is a close relative of the mountain hare of northern Europe but is recognised as a sub-species because they do not normally grow a white coat in winter and are noticeably smaller in size. It is a legally protected species in Ireland. Unlike rabbits, hares do not burrow underground but occupy ground surface dens known as "forms" where are just sheltered areas of flattened vegetation. They are herbivores which means they eat only plant life such as willow, gorse, grasses, young heather etc.

Baby hares are known as leverets and when born they weigh around 100 grams and are fully furred and have their eyes open. Only the female hare gives parental care to the leverets.

## and Biodiversity Trail



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# Belcarra Riverside Walk

## Grey Heron

*Corr réisc*

Hérons are often encountered as single birds but when breeding they live in colonies called "heronries" where there can be many birds.

Their diet is very varied ranging from fish, frogs, small mammals and insects. They usually start to breed when they are 2 years old and have one clutch of 3-4 eggs. Incubation of the eggs is 29 days and time to fledging is 55 days.

## and Biodiversity Trail



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## Daubenton's Bat

Bats eat thousands of flying insects every night, including midges. Daubenton's bat is often called the "water bat" because it flies just a few centimetres above lakes and rivers.

You can often see it flying over the Manulla River if you watch from the bridge near the Community Centre. They roost under the stone bridge.

## and Biodiversity Trail



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## A Brief History

Elm Hall was built by Gerald Cuff in 1726. Gerald was the son of Sir James Cuff who was one of Oliver Cromwell's commissioners in Connacht. Operating from Loughrea, Co. Galway, Sir James had overseen the acquisition of the land of Connacht "to the end it be planted with such as are Protestants or of the English nation". Hundreds of Cromwellian soldiers, transplanters and adventurers became the new owners. In the process, the Cuffs amassed thousands of acres throughout county Mayo - in Tyrrawley, Ballinrobe, Belcarra and other areas. Closely aligned to the Gore, Browne and Knox families the Cuffs became one of the most powerful families in Mayo. Elm Hall was built in a townland originally known as "Ínan na hÁbhan". It was a plantation house with extensive gardens, its own deer park, and a "Leisure House" on the bank of the nearby Manulla River. It was let to the Jordans of Murrisk in the 1770s and to members of the Browne family of Westport from the 1780s until the early 19th century. A daughter of this house, Louisa Browne became the wife of George Henry Moore, M.P. of Moorehall and the mother of George Moore, the novelist. In 1797 Gerald Cuff's grandson, James Cuff of Elm Hall and Ballinrobe, was created Baron Tyrrawley and a member of the Irish House of Lords. He is thought to have supported the Act of Union. He is buried in the family vault in Ballinrobe churchyard. One year later, during the 1798 Rebellion, Elm Hall was reduced to ruins - presumably by General Humbert's victorious French troops and his Irish insurgents, during the so-called "Races of Castlebar". In the 1800's the Cuffs lived at Deel Castle, Crossmolina and Ballinrobe Castle but still owned over 3,000 acres of land in the Belcarra area - and had hundreds of tenants. The last of the Cuffs, Colonel St. George Cuff, a veteran of Waterloo, was a benevolent landlord but his niece, Harriet Gardiner, who succeeded him was very cruel to her tenants. The nearby Eviction Cottage museum tells the story of the hardship she inflicted on her tenantry.

## Elm Hall (Belcarra)

