

Company: Roadstone Provinces Ltd.

Location: BALLYELLEN quarry, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland

Objective To create a habitat that supports a wide diversity of flora and fauna.

Context This quarry is excavated in limestone. The surroundings are relatively flat and excavation has extended below the level of the nearby Barrow river, creating considerable internal relief. The quarry operations ceased for over ten years with subsequent natural habitats being naturally formed in the landscape.

Solution The disused section of the quarry has exposed stable cliffs of exposed calcareous rock and extensive tracts of dry calcareous grassland, either developed directly on the rock debris or on the overburden at the South West corner. Grassland areas have been developed to support the growth of flora that will support in turn wildlife. A sump pond exists in the disused quarry with an artificial pond connected to a reed and large sedge swamp to the east. The surface water from the working area was directed towards the pond so that there would be a continuous flow of clean water to the pond. The excess water from the pond is pumped out to the river barrow.

Result Limestone cliffs and rocky slopes surround the southern end of the site in a series of small bays and platforms at different levels. Between boulders a few ferns are established – rustyback, wall rue and harts tongue as well as some seedling trees of ash. Locally there is wall valerian and in one place on compact sand over rock blue fleabane.

The old quarry drops to an E-W pond. There are a number of willow bushes, particularly in the swamp. The pond has grassy surrounds with some meadowsweet, fleabane and soft rush. Algae and water starwort grow in the water which supports wildlife.

The rabbit has become the commonest mammal on site. Hares are also seen. A fox earth is present in the old section of the quarry and foxes have been witnessed on occasion. Of smaller species the stoat is seen regularly and pygmy shrew is also in one place on the SW corner.

The cliffs support a pair of peregrines. Northwest of the pond man-made sand cliffs have a colony of sand martins. Mallard, little grebe and moorhen nest in the pond and the surroundings while snipe are often seen. Willow warblers are frequent in this area and a pair of reed buntings also nests. In winter mallard, teal and wigeon occur regularly. Swans visit the pond on occasion.

Small nesting species associated with bushes and scrub including blackbird, song thrush, robin, wren, dunnock, goldcrest blue tit, linnet, bullfinch and goldfinch are supported in the old quarry. Both smooth newt and frog occur and breed in the wetland habitat.

