



Traditional Dry Stone Walls – Claíocha Cloiche Traidisiúnta

by Gráinne Ní Chonghaile

When you first set foot on the Aran Islands and /or the Burren, the mosaic of farmed fields surrounded by a maze of stonewalls, is one of the most striking features which catches your attention. Participant farmers within the ACRES scheme may avail of funding to maintain and to repair these traditional stonewalls.



AERIAL OVERVIEW OF ARAN STONE WALLS. Source: GeoAerospace

General Action - Stonewall Maintenance

A maximum budget of €7,000 per year is available for ACRES CP Core Payment. 'Core Payment' is the sum of all ACRES CP results-based payments plus ACRES General Action payments. The core 'Traditional Stone Wall Maintenance' is one of the main actions applicable to the Aran Islands and the Burren. On smaller farms (less than 23 hectares) which are quite typically found on the Aran Islands), some farmers have included the traditional stonewall maintenance option under the General Action to increase payment up to the maximum €7,000.

Walls suitable for this action must have been identified by the farmer's advisor at time of entering the scheme and cannot be added in at a later date.

Stonewall Maintenance Payments

€0.76m max 4000m per annum
(min 10m)

In addition to the Core Payment, Non-Productive Investments (NPIs) are actions that are available to ACRES farmers, to address environmental issues on the farm, which will directly contribute to environmental objectives or increase their

capacity to improve field scores through improved management, and Stonewall Repair is one such NPI.

NPI - Stonewall Repair

This NPI must **not** be selected on the same walls that are already selected for under the 'Traditional Stone Wall Maintenance' General Action:

- ▶ All sections of wall mapped for repair must be repaired to a solid, secure and stock-proof standard.
- ▶ Stones used to repair walls should be fallen stone from the existing wall.
- ▶ Stones should not be taken from zones of notification around any archaeological site or monument.
- ▶ Mature trees along the wall must be retained.



STONE WALL REPAIR. Source: Conor Coyne

As the maintenance of stonewalls is a priority particularly on the Aran Islands, and if farmers have not availed of the 'Traditional Stone Wall Maintenance' general action at the start of the scheme, they should consider adding in suitable walls in the 'Repair of Traditional Stone Wall' NPI option on the Annual Works Plan, with different walls selected each year.

Stonewall Repair Payments

€3.03/m 2 sided max 1000m per annum
(min 10m)

€1.59/m 1 sided max 500m per annum
(min 10m)

Wildlife Friendly Options to Help Control Rodents on the Farm

by Neal Jeuken

Rodent pests such as rats and mice pose biosecurity issues on farms, and their control is an important part of farm management. In the below, we highlight some good practice tips alongside certain NPI actions that might be beneficial to help with the control of rodents on the farm.



AN EXAMPLE OF A 'SMART', RODENTICIDE FREE RODENT TRAP. Source: Donal Hogan

The use of rodenticides (poisoned baits) is often seen as the first port of call when dealing with pests such as rats and mice, however, the widespread use of rodenticides has been linked to non-target secondary poisoning and declines of certain native birds, such as Barn Owls and Kestrels (who eat these poisoned rodents). Worryingly too, there are early signs that some rodents may be developing resistance to rodenticides, increasing the need to use alternative, more wildlife friendly options.

In many cases, the first step to addressing rodent related issues on farms, is to reduce access to any feed stores, such as concentrate ration, which might be luring in rodents. In ACRES CP, farmers

can avail of the funded NPI 'Mobile Feed Storage Bins', in which ration feed for livestock can be securely stored on the farm.

Then the 'Rodenticide Free Rodent Control' NPI supports the use of lethal, but poison-free 'smart' traps that specifically target pests such as rats. This NPI is strongly encouraged in order to reduce the use of rodenticides on farms, especially in areas where Barn Owls are a conservation target.

Furthermore, encouraging the return of nesting Barn Owls to an area is also supported, recognising the direct benefits these birds of prey can bring in terms of natural rodent control. Where suitable, a well-placed 'Barn Owl Nest Box' NPI, installed at least 3m up in an open barn or on a mature tree may help bring this beautiful bird, who is an expert hunter of rats and mice, back to the farm.



1: AN IDEAL OPEN BARN. Source: Neal Jeuken

2: EXAMPLE OF A BARN OWL NEST BOX. Image source: <https://www.irishgardenbirds.ie/>

News: As we move into the longer evenings the team are busy preparing for NPI screening which starts this month. The NPI window closed on Monday 4th of November and in the coming week the team will begin screening each action on each farm plan.

The annual Winterage weekend took place over the October Bank Holiday weekend and was a great success despite the wet weather. A crowd of over 600 people participated in the annual cattle drive in which 25 cows of native breeds were herded up onto the winterage on McGann's farm in Carron, now owned and run by the NPWS. The Burren Aran team were on hand on both Saturday and Sunday to answer any questions from local farmers and the visiting public.

Get in touch or follow us

Carran Office: 065 708 9000

085 179 0680

Oifig Inis Oirr: 083 152 3930



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



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